University of Alberta

Finding Support On-Line: Exploring the Internet Dialogue of Second Generation Ex-Member Children of God/ The Family

by

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requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Dedication

I would like to thank my husband Earl Phillips for his constant support and love, my Mother Pat Inglis, for without her, I would not have finished this work, and my daughter Georgia, for she is the reason for why I do anything.

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Introduction

The Children of God rose from the counter-culture of the late 1960s. The group was first known as 'Teens for Christ,' but following the negative press it received in the late 1970s, the group changed its name to 'The Family of Love,' and is currently known as The Family.[1] The group has since grown into a fundamentalist Christian sect that encompasses about twelve thousand followers (The family, 2004). The group's prophet, the late David Berg, (known to the group as Moses David, Mo, Dad, or Granddad), founded the Children of God as an apocalyptic, fundamentalist religious group that questioned the foundations of our 'systemite'[2] world.

As a faith, The Family questions the norms and behaviours of mainstream society. Due to the unconventional customs that David Berg encouraged, and that his followers practised, the group appealed to many young people in the late 1960s. Many of these young people stayed in the group throughout the 1970s and 1980s and began to have children. Academics in the field of religion often refer to these young people, born in a sect, as 'second-generation' members. By the late 1980s, many second-generation teens in The Family were having doubts about their faith and their devotion to David Berg

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[1] I will use 'The Family' when referring to 'The Children of God,' and 'The Family of Love' throughout this text.

[2] The Family use 'systemite' to refer to the majority of society who do not follow the teachings of David Moses.

(Kent, 2000, p. 57). Subsequently, many of these second-generation members chose to leave The Family.

The parents of the majority of the second-generation decided to join The Children of God after 'dropping out' of mainstream society in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The second-generation has grown up in a very unconventional manner, living communally, being home schooled, and learning to proselytise from a very young age. This unique lifestyle made integration with the outside world difficult for departing second-generation young people. For the second-generation, therefore, the decision to leave The Family is a complicated and difficult undertaking.

A former member of that generation created the website <movingon.org> to serve as an information source for current members wanting to leave The Family. It also serves as a virtual meeting place for former second-generation members. These former members discuss many topics within the virtual rooms available at <movingon.org>, including sexual and physical abuse. In this thesis I posit that the message board entitled 'creeps' is a virtual support group for former second-generation members. Furthermore, I seek to understand how the individuals who use this virtual space, communicate support to one another. I will examine the discourse of support by looking at a written exchange called 'horror' on the 'creeps' message board.

To better contextualize the use of <movingon.org>, this work first presents some historical and functional information about The Family. In Chapter One, I provide an overview of the structure of The Family. I examine the historical beginnings of The

Family and reveal how its leader, David Berg, came to consider himself God's 'end-time prophet.' Because the main tenet of this thesis is to explore some of the experiences of The Family's second-generation, Chapter One also includes a review of some contemporary literature written about The Family. This review reveals the lack of academic interest in researching the experiences of The Family's second-generation.

Chapter Two lays the foundation for understanding the experiences of the second-generation. First, I present some of The Family's own literature, known as the Mo Letters. Secondly, I offer some of the main findings found in the written judgement in a child custody case between a grandmother and her daughter (who is a Family member) by the Right Honourable Lord Justice Alan Ward in the High Court of Justice, Family division (London, England). In this chapter, I find that the child rearing practices of The Family were detrimental to its many young members. I observe that many of the children who grew up in The Family were at risk of sexual and physical mistreatment. Moreover, I also show that the sect's top leadership fully sanctioned the abuse.

Chapter Three provides the theoretical framework for how support groups function. In this chapter I demonstrate that virtual support groups operate in a similar manner to that of traditional support groups. A review of the research into virtual support groups shows that there is a plethora of studies about the structure of on-line support groups. There is, however, little in the way of study about the content of the supportive conversations that go on within these on-line groups. This chapter demonstrates the necessity and importance for the study of the discourse of support in a virtual space.

Chapter Four describes in detail the website <movingon.org>. In this section, I present the methodology that I used to analyze the written discourse on one part of it. I also include the results from both the content analysis and the discourse analysis.

My thesis ends with a discussion of the findings. I argue the advantages and disadvantages for the use of on-line support groups, such as <movingon.org>. Additionally, I discuss some limitations of this study and make recommendations that will further the study not only of the religious sect, The Family, but also of the Internet as a forum for social support.

Chapter One: History and Literature Review

An Overview of The Children of God/ The Family

The Family's official web site, <thefamily.org>, provides a comprehensive description of its major beliefs. In essence, the group holds a dogmatic tradition that follows a fundamentalist belief system. For example, The Family believes that the Bible is the inspired word of God and that the scriptures are sacred revelations. Its members believe in the literal meaning of the Book of Genesis and oppose evolutionary theory. The Family also believes that Jesus Christ died for the sins of humanity and is the savior of humankind.

The Family's followers adhere to a 'born again' philosophy, meaning that they must freely accept Jesus as their saviour and perform specific rituals as an induction into this way of life. Members believe in the existence of angels, the devil, and spiritual warfare. They believe that angels visit earth in various forms, and that the devil is constantly testing Family followers. The Family sees temptation as a form of struggle, which leads to the belief that, as followers, they face continual persecution from the outside world.

Members of The Family highlight their central belief in the power of prayer. For The Family, prayer induces spiritual healing and also physical healing. Additionally, and fundamental to their faith, is their resolute belief that the end-time (Armageddon) soon will be at hand and will lead to the ultimate battle for the souls of humanity. Moreover, they argue that the battle of Armageddon will end with the Second Coming of

Christ. The members of The Family believe that their true duty to God is to save as many human souls as possible before the end-time. They believe that they, like the early followers of Christ, should set out to spread the word of God.

Most Family members' daily routine consists of missionary work. Because members often travel extensively, missionary life in The Family encourages followers to adopt the unconventional practice of communal living. They believe that this form of "close fellowship and spiritual unity fostered by such a lifestyle provided the early disciples with a needed spiritual haven of respite from the interminable hostilities of their religious enemies and the glaring idolatry of Pagan Rome" (The Family, 2004).

Since The Family's inception, controversy has plagued the religious sect. Allegations of prostitution, sexual misconduct, and child sexual abuse haunt The Family's history. Although The Family now appears fairly docile, the turmoil of its past continues to affect many of its former members and many of the children raised as its second-generation.

To obtain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the many children raised in The Family, it is important to understand the group's foundations. What follows is not a comprehensive history of The Family or of Berg's life (for a complete history see Kent, 1994; Van Zandt, 1991; and Davis with Davis, 1983). What follows is a chronologically ordered list of key events from The Family's history that provides an appropriate grounding for my work's main thesis.

A History: The Children of God/The Family

The Children of God began in December 1967. The Family's initial leader, David Brandt Berg, was born in Oakland, California in February 1919, and was the last of three Berg children. Both Berg's parents, Virginia and Hjalmer Berg, were Christian evangelists. As evangelists, the Berg family travelled throughout the United States and Canada. Following Hjalmer's death, Berg's mother, Virginia, moved her family to Miami, Florida were she founded a church associated with the Christian and Missionary Alliance (Davis with Davis, 1984, p. 21). David Berg's major ambitions for his own ministry grew out of his parents' involvement, in particular his mother's, with this conservative Christian denomination.

In 1944, Berg met and married Jane Miller (known as Mother Eve to the group). The newlyweds soon joined Berg's mother in her travelling ministry. Berg and Jane started their own family, and had four children between 1945 and 1951. In June 1948, Berg left his mother's ministry to attend Southern California Bible College in Pasadena, California. Following this brief stint at Bible school (he stayed for only three months), he rejoined his mother's ministry and served as a pastor to a Christian and Missionary Alliance church in Valley Falls, Arizona (Davis with Davis, 1984, p. 23). Shortly after this appointment, he again left his position. Berg explained that he left due to the racism among the white parishioners towards the local Native Americans. Later, Deborah Berg (Berg's eldest daughter) speculated that this was not the case, and in fact his discharge

was due to allegations of sexual misconduct (Davis with Davis, 1984, p. 24; Kent, 1994, p. 144).

In 1954, Berg met Fred Jordan. He again uprooted his family to accept a job at Jordan's Texas Soul Clinic. Jordan trained missionaries for foreign travel and conducted a television ministry. Berg stayed at this position for thirteen years until his dismissal in 1967 (Davis with Davis, 1984, p. 26). Berg left with his family and went on the preaching circuit in the United States and Canada. During this period, Berg's mother, Virginia, moved to Huntington Beach, California and started a small ministry that preached the gospel to the local hippie community. Aware of her son's dismissal, Virginia asked him to come to California to join her in this ministry. Berg and his family did so, and stayed at this ministry until 1969 (Davis with Davis. 1984, p. 48; Van Zandt, 1991, pp.33-34).

At Huntington Beach his new ministry, The Children of God, took shape. The group began with Berg and his mother conducting small non-denominational services and the provision of free sandwiches at the Huntington Beach Light Club. By 1968, Berg and his family took over and supervised the Light Club Mission full time. This take-over was made possible by the death of Virginia in March 1968, after which Berg became the ministry's primary preacher. In this new role, Berg led this small band of hippies and developed The Children of God (which later became The Family of Love/The Family). As Berg's daughter (Deborah Davis) notes about her father's ministry at the Light Club,

"He was laying the foundation, either consciously or unconsciously, for his role as God's prophet"(Davis with Davis, 1983, p. 38).

In April 1969, Berg's group left Huntington Beach. At this time Berg began an adulterous affair with one of his young followers, Karen Zerby (later known as Maria/Momma). Zerby soon became an integral member of Berg's ministry and has since proven to be significant to its survival. Influenced by his mother's mission and his evangelist upbringing, Berg began to recruit new followers throughout the United States. To do this, he divided the group into teams, each one under the leadership of either Berg and Maria (Zerby), his legal wife Jane (Mother Eve), or each of his older children. Berg and Maria went to Laurentides, Quebec in Canada. Following their travels to Canada, Berg began to see himself as the direct prophet of God. In Laurentides he claimed to receive dramatic 'prophesies' that would solidify his relationship with Maria and have immense significance in his new role as 'prophet' (Davis with Davis, 1984, pp. 46-51; Van Zandt, 1991, pp. 34-36).

Following their time in Laurentides, Berg and Maria asked all their followers to gather together in Vienna, Virginia. There, Berg laid out his plan for the teaching of future leaders, and informed his followers of his reputed revelation of the end-time. Berg informed members of his prophecy about the destruction of the United States due to its class inequity. This prediction was a major turning point for Berg and his followers because it solidified his position as charismatic leader, and allowed Berg to create his own ministry with his own ideological beliefs. Soon, Berg began to preach an

unorthodox doctrine that eventually led to a formal set of beliefs (Davis with Davis, 1984, p. 52).

In 1970, Berg rekindled his relationship with Fred Jordan and brought his group back to Texas to stay at Jordan's Texas Soul Clinic ranch. Berg organised his movement into tribes, modelling his vision after the twelve tribes of Israel. To each of these tribes he ascribed a specific function such as childcare, education, printing and publishing, and food preparation (Davis with Davis, 1984, p.83).

Berg spent his time at the Texas Soul Clinic teaching classes to a select group of disciples whom he designated as leaders or leadership trainees. Berg tape-recorded many of these 'lectures' and subsequently he had them transcribed. The production of these lectures, called Mo Letters, was the beginning of an important aspect of Berg's ministry. The Mo Letters led to what The Family calls the 'literature revolution.' The Mo Letters became the primary way that Berg communicated with his followers in the years to come (Van Zandt, 1991 pp. 43-44).

Another turning point in both Berg's biography and the group's history was Berg's visit to a Gypsy camp near Houston in 1970 (Davis with Davis, 1984, p. 85). In one of Berg's letters, "Abrahim the Gypsy King", he recounted that he visited with the king of their tribe. After this visit, Berg told his followers that he had the 'gift of speaking in tongues.' From Maria's perspective, "David would speak in Abrihim's tongue, and most of what he said was in that language as Abrihim spoke through him in

the language the Lord had given him . . . . [h]e closed his eyes and prayed in tongues" (Zerby quoted in Berg, 1970a, p. 2363-2364).

In the early 1970s, the group experienced negative press, which eventually drove Berg and Maria to leave the United States for England in April 1972. Berg encouraged his followers in the Mo Letter, "Great Escape" (April, 1972b) to 'escape' the U.S. The majority of his disciples moved to different parts of England and eventually to Europe, where they established small communal colonies in France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, and Spain. Later, groups missionized Latin America, South America, Australia, and New Zealand (Kent, 1994, p. 135).

In 1973, Berg wrote a controversial letter called "Revolutionary Sex." In it, he described some of his early sexual experiences. This letter would prove to be the beginning of a ministry devoted to sexuality. While in England, Berg and Maria began to experiment with a new way of witnessing. In the Mo Letter series, "King Arthur's Nights" (1976a), Berg explained a new proselytising method called Flirty Fishing or FFing. He instructed his female followers to use sex to lure men into the ministry. Berg used the metaphor of fishing taken from Jesus' instruction in the Bible to go out and be fishers of men. FFing soon became one of the main forms of witnessing for The Children of God. Former member Miriam Williams indicates that these new doctrines, "changed The Family permanently from a radical Jesus People commune into a sacred sex cult" (Williams, 1998, p.106.)

In January 1978, Berg launched the Re-organisation Nationalisation Revolution in response to growing questions from followers about both his claims of divine appointment as God's end-time prophet and the radical sexual mores that he was proposing (Van Zandt, 1991, pp. 48-50). Many of Berg's own family members, such as Deborah and Mother Eve, were let go or quit at this time. Following the re-organisation, FFing increased, as did Berg's writings on sexuality.

In 1979, Berg began to write letters describing his own childhood sexual experiences. These letters would change the tone of childcare in The Family. In 1982, due to The Family's emphasis on sexual freedom and its strict policy against any form of birth control, the group saw an annual birth rate of 75 births per 1000 adults (Bainbridge, 2002, p. 26). Soon, children comprised the majority of full-time members. The Family's young mothers found caring for their many children difficult while still having daily witnessing duties (Kent and Hall, 2000, p. 64). In response, Family leaders devised a plan to unburden young parents to allow them to continue their group's work. The Family established school homes to care for their youngest members. These homes provided education and discipleship training. Chapter two of this thesis discusses in more detail the large centres developed for child-care.

Berg's death in 1994 did not lead to the end of The Family. To this day, Maria remains at the head of the organisation. Berg's wife and her companion, Peter Amsterdam, continue to manage its ministry and their proselytising activities throughout the world. The group is alive and well particularly in South America.

A Review of the Academic Discussions Regarding the Children Raised in The Children of God/The Family

Academic writing about the Children of God/ The Family tends to deal predominately with aspects of Flirty-Fishing. The group itself is quite open about FFing being practiced up until the late 1980s. The group, however, is reluctant to discuss the more controversial Mo Letters, written between 1974 and 1980. In 1990 the organization directed its members to purge their homes of this controversial literature. These letters, however, had already inflicted a great deal of damage on young members of this group.

In 1974, Berg published the first of his letters in the series entitled "The Law of Love." These letters begin a decade-long proliferation of abusive child pornography. Because Family members took instructions given in the Mo Letters as the word of God, many members subjected their children to controversial if not sexually abusive child rearing. Currently, The Family fails to recognize the voices of many of the children who suffered abuse because of these practices. Not only does The Family ignore these young people, but also, the academic world, with its ideology of objectivity and political correctness, fails to give voice to them. What follows is an overview of the literature written about The Family in the last twenty years that deals with it youngest members.

Sex, Slander, and Salvation (1994) is a collection of pro-Family writings by various academics. It provides a comprehensive but biased look at Family activities. The editors of the volume, James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, disclose that The Family leadership contracted them to assemble this collection of essays (Lewis and Melton.

1994, pp. vi-vii). In their introduction, Lewis and Melton state that The Family was seeking advice in dealing with the negative publicity that the group had received following the Argentinean and French raids on Family homes in 1993. They report that the authors, whom Family leadership invited to participate in this current volume, presented relatively informal papers. Therefore, the editors cannot claim that their book is scientifically rigorous.

Lewis and Melton called their work a 'patchwork quilt,' (1994, p. ix), but the majority of their collection is from pro-Family perspectives and they chose to ignore academic writings that take critical positions against the group. Furthermore, they do not include writings taken from ex-member perspectives. Their work, therefore does not present a thoroughly balanced view of The Family.

Lewis and Melton visited many Family homes and concluded that there was no obvious signs of abuse in these homes (Lewis and Melton, 1994, p.vii). While their conclusion might be true, they cannot generalize it to every Family home. They argue, for example, that there was no evidence to confirm allegations of child abuse in the cases of the French and Argentinean Family raids (Lewis and Melton, 1994, p.vii). Testimony, however, in the British custody case found that Family members coerced some of the children's testimony. Furthermore, authorities failed to properly investigate these

allegations, particularly in the Argentinean case. For example, in Argentina AB[3] testified to forceful sexual participation, at the age of thirteen, with a Shepherdess's husband, who was a man around the age of forty. She admitted to lying about the sexual abuse at the time of the investigation into The Family homes. She stated that she did this to protect The Family. She stated: "The doctor was supposed to check me for signs of sexual abuse, but since I looked so healthy and normal he decided just to take my word for it. He asked me if I had ever had sex and I answered no"(quoted in Ward, 1995, p. 91). Furthermore, evidence that young Family members lied to the investigators and that the investigators simply took their word that abuse was not happening, arouses serious doubt about the nature of the investigation and also the conclusions drawn from it.

Lewis and Melton dedicate two chapters in their book to second-generation Family members and allegations of abuse. The chapters written by child psychologist, Lawrence Lilliston, and sociologist of religion Gary Sheperd, provide a limited amount of information on this topic. They state that Family members face undue amounts of criticism because The Family has both a liberal attitude toward sexuality and a commitment to communal living. Furthermore, they state that criticism comes predominantly from "disgruntled former members"(Lilliston and Sheperd, 1994, p. 55).

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[3]Initials the British court case used to protect the identity of the person who testified against the Family.

Lilliston's and Sheperd's investigation is based upon a Family approved study of thirty-two children in five Family homes in California. In their study they found no evidence of abuse of these particular children. Their work, however, is problematic, because the researchers fail to use a random sample of Family members. Additionally, they allude to base rates of child abuse (Lilliston and Sheperd, 1994, p.56) but fail to give convincing evidence that The Family's incidents of child abuse is lower than the world's base rates. Their findings, therefore, that there is no evidence of abuse in these particular cases, does not mean that The Family does not have a high rate of child sexual abuse.

Another problematic area of Lilliston's and Sheperd's work is their statement about Maria's son Davidito. They claim that "there is no report of his [Davidito] having been actively molested or abused by adults" (Lilliston and Sheperd, 1994, p. 50). The Family's book about his early years in Berg's household, *The Story of Davidito*, contains explicit stories and pictures documenting his sexual abuse. They also claim to have interviewed Davidito and report that he shows no long-term negative effects because of the treatment at the hands of Maria, Berg, and other leaders. Since, however, the publication of Lewis and Melton's book in 1994, Davidito has come foreword and stated that he was in fact sexually abused (Kent, 2004, p.1).

In the British court case mentioned earlier, Lilliston presented evidence favoring The Family. As noted, he obtained evidence from interviews of thirty-two children out of a possible eight thousand. Consequently, Justice Ward found that Lilliston's observations were superficial and lacked academic credibility. He stated that "Dr.

Lilliston seems to have viewed The Family through his rose colored spectacles"(Ward, 1995, p. 222).

James D. Chancellor's work, *Life in The Family: An Oral History of the Children of God* (2000), provides a moderate, objective view of The Family. Over the course of three years Chancellor studied both the positive and some of the critical literature written about The Family. Chancellor stayed in many Family homes and had many members come to live with him. In his own words, he sees his work as "an oral history of the movement from the perspective of persons who have chosen to remain loyal and committed disciples of Father David" (Chancellor, 2000, p. xviii). Chancellor chose to present the views of current members of The Family, but, he investigates their controversial past as well. He does not shy away, as some other academics do, from the issue of alleged child abuse. It appears that he has had access to the group's more controversial writings, along with the court transcripts from the British court case in which Justice Ward presided and ruled.

One shortcoming of Chancellor's writings is that he did not have access to the sect's top leadership, so he concentrated instead on the disciples at work. For this and other reasons Chancellor admitted that his study provides a broad perspective but does not tell the whole story (2000, p. xxii). Another interesting aspect of his work is his observation that The Family tried to overtly influence his opinions of its leadership. He states that, "The Family used every opportunity to paint as positive a picture as possible"

(Chancellor, 2000, p. xxii). This statement raises doubt from a critical perspective about the reliability of the information he received.

Chancellor states that he is "confident that child abuse is less frequent in The Family than in society at large"(2000, p. 133). He then qualifies this statement, stating that this has not always been the case. He acknowledges former members who allege that their lives in The Family consisted of systematic abuse throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Unfortunately he fails to make this abuse part of his main thesis. The majority of Chancellor's work focuses on FFing and the actions of the first generation adult group members. At one point in his book, however, he references the Mo Letter, "The Devil Hates Sex! But God Loves It!" In a footnote Chancellor recognizes that if the references to incest and lack of age limitations on sexual contact were to have been acted on, then this counsel would have been problematic (Chancellor, 2000, p. 101). Given the testimony of several incidents of sexual misconduct by sect-affiliated members, there is little doubt that members acted on this letter.

The book, *The End-Time Family: The Children of God* (2002), is an endeavor by its author (William Sims Bainbridge) to uncover some of the mystery surrounding this small religious sect. In *The End-Time Family,* Bainbridge attempts to explain religious behavior through an empirical study. Bainbridge uses comparative survey analysis, a technique not often used when trying to understand religious sects, mostly because of non-compliance from the groups themselves. His comparative analysis used the results of the General Social Survey (GSS), which is an instrument designed to test American

opinion and social life, in comparison with a survey that he conducted of group members. The United States has implemented the GSS to gather demographic data for the past thirty years.

With approval from the group's leadership, Bainbridge obtained over one thousand completed questionnaires. He then compared the sect's members to the American population. As he states, the comparison factors are aspects of sectarian tension, which involve supernatural beliefs, religious practices, and feelings of alienation. Following the discussion of these factors, he ends with two chapters that compare The Family's unique approach to sexuality and children with mainstream American society.

Bainbridge attempts to understand the inner working of this small sectarian group. His findings are what one might expect, given what we already know about the Children of God, in essence, they are different from mainstream American society. Perhaps supplementary qualitative data would have allowed him to tell us something new. Bainbridge states that he visited numerous Family homes and conducted lengthy interviews with Family members. He fails to use this information, however, to get inside the inner workings of Family life. He reduces this complicated social group into one that is accessible only to the reader through demographics and comparative statistics. In short, he fails to unveil anything of real interest and says nothing about the lives of the second-generation.

Given The Family's controversial past, Bainbridge's readers long to know more about the individual members of this group. Questions arise such as: are there problems

with marital conflict over its practice of sexual sharing?; what is the perspective of the women within the group regarding their position of submission to men?; and importantly, how does The Family manage the allegations of sexual abuse with regard to children in the group? Unfortunately Bainbridge never addresses these questions in his work.

Finally, Stephen Kent, who is a sociologist of religion, wrote about The Family in several published articles and conducted interviews with many ex-members second generation individuals (Kent, 2000). These articles examined The Family's education programs designed for youth with waning commitment. Kent wrote about The Family's re-indoctrination programs that often involved intense re-education using physical, psychological, and socio-emotional punishments. Additionally, Kent identified a widespread rejection of The Family's/ Children of God's teachings by the second generation (Kent, 2004). He identified Berg's policies and doctrines as key components as to why many the second generation have chosen to leave The Family. Kent also argued that, due to Berg's policies, many of the young people feel abused, exploited, and hostile towards many of the group's top leadership (Kent, 2004).

In conclusion, most of the contemporary literature written about The Family (with exception of Kent) fails either to adequately research the children in this group or to investigate the allegations of abuse. Along these lines, Susan Palmer, who is co-editor of *Children in New Religions,* notes "that the study of children in new religious movements is a largely uncharted terrain" (Palmer, 1999, p. 1). She goes further to state that:

> . . . . no self-respecting researcher today would disregard the voices of women, but they rarely bother to listen to children. If we do not take seriously their own versions of reality and realize that children are active in the construction and determination of their own lives, how can we possibly begin to assess their well being inside controversial communities or analyze their impact on the futures of new religious movements (Palmer, 1999, p. 3).

In order to gain understanding of the experience of the children in The Family we must first understand the framework of their lives. The next chapter investigates the child-rearing environment of The Family in the 1980s and 90s by analyzing Berg's writings on child rearing and child discipline.

Chapter Two: The Experiences of Children in The Family

This chapter provides evidence that, prior to 1990, many of the children born and raised within The Family were at risk and often were subject to sexually inappropriate behavior and severe physical mistreatment. The Family's top leadership and the writings of David Berg condoned and encouraged these abuses. An analysis of the Mo Letters written between 1972 and 1985 reveal that Berg often gave explicit instructions to his followers for the provision and care of The Family's ever-increasing population of children, and that those instructions often fostered abuses. This chapter provides substantiation of the sexual maltreatment by triangulating Berg's writings with a summary of evidence presented to Justice Ward in a British custody battle in 1995. This triangulation shows that Berg encouraged both sexual conduct between adults and children, and sexually inappropriate child rearing techniques.

Additional evidence also reveals the severe physical mistreatment of children within The Family during the 1970s and early 1980s. Again, using two main sources along with contemporary academic accounts, I argue that that Berg condoned and even encouraged severe beatings and physical isolation as appropriate forms of child discipline. This chapter, therefore, provides the background for understanding the abuses that the second-generation ex-members discuss on the <movingon.org> website.

Encouragement of Child Sexuality

The following excerpts from the Mo Letters establish the groundwork for demonstrating the nature of Berg's sexual revolution within The Family. I chose letters

that specifically illustrate the pertinent details of Berg's (and consequently The Family's) child rearing philosophy.

Berg wrote the Mo Letters as a way of communicating to his followers the word of God as he claimed to receive it. The Mo Letters served as the essential guides to everyday living for members. They were not to turn away from the rules set out in them. Members believed that these letters were incontrovertible, no matter if they contradicted one another or even if years later they knew the writings were inappropriate. Members simply re-interpreted the letters so that the message would be more appropriate to a modern audience. David Van Zandt (1991), who did a participant observation on The Family, concluded that the Mo Letters contained four basic presuppositions. These were:

1. The assumption that all the textual assertions are taken as statements of fact. This applies to obvious factual statements in the text, and to most of the interpretative suggestions offered by David Berg.
2. The assumption that the texts include all the important truths known to humanity. The Mo Letters and the Bible do not need any supplementation from human sources. Supplementation is only possible via further revelation from God (through David Berg).
3. The Mo Letters and the Bible contain simple and transparent truths that even a child can understand. In fact, the child is often in a better position to understand them because his or her mind has not been corrupted and clouded by secular education.

4. The texts have a clear, pragmatic value for the conduct of everyday life. His [Berg's] advice is considered to be the best possible on any particular problem (Van Zandt, 1991, pp. 121-122).

All of the above presuppositions have a fundamental connecting presupposition which is that both the Mo Letters and the Bible are the Word of God passed though non-distorting human vessels or communicators (Van Zandt, 1991, p.122).

The Mo Letters are, therefore, as fundamentally important to Family members as biblical text. Van Zandt asserts, "all CoG [Children of God] members share the presupposition that God is a spiritual entity that can alter the physical world, and corollary to this assumption, that moral rules and empirical conclusions given by God (through the Mo Letters and the Bible) are true beyond challenge" (Van Zandt, 1991 p.136). These presuppositions are important to remember when analyzing some of the assertions made in the Mo Letters. If Family members did not follow the Mo Letters and their instructions, then they committed a sin not only against David Berg but also against God.

The Mo Letters illustrate information that Berg felt parents should implement to encourage a 'healthy' sexual life for children. For example, many of the letters contain information about children exploring their own bodies and encouraging masturbation for children as young as seven. At Berg's direction, Family members engaged in open displays of their sexuality. Berg encouraged sharing sexually with multiple partners, and felt that parents should encourage sexual play for their young children.

Berg not only encouraged children to have sex, but also he used his own unconventional childhood sexual experiences as evidence for the appropriateness of this encouragement. Berg's writings about his sexual experiences as a young child indicate that his childhood was fraught with sexual abuse by the adults around him. These writings do little to convince readers that this behavior is beneficial to children.

Composed in March 1973, "Revolutionary Sex" is the 258th Mo Letter. Berg already had written explicitly about sexual relationships between adults, and in this publication he presented his followers with the new revolutionary rules.[4] "Revolutionary Sex" began a series of many letters addressing the sexual education of young children. Here is an excerpt from this letter:

> They [children] should be encouraged in nude mixed bathing and nude mixed play where socially, legally and climatically permissible and acceptable and advisable. They should also not be prohibited from mutual sexual examination, experimentation or interplay when playing or sleeping together where legally possible and social and housing conditions permit. . . . But it must be made very clear to your children that such sexual freedom must never be indulged in or practised openly in the presence of visitors, strangers or uninitiated relatives and friends who have not been

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[4]See Mo Letter "Revolutionary Rules", March 1972.

> properly re-educated in the revolutionary sexual freedoms of natural living! (Berg, 1973c, p. 2006).

Although the encouragement of children exploring their own bodies is not deviant, Berg's insistence about the secrecy of these acts suggests sinister behaviour. The Family often defends these writings by stating that Berg and The Family simply were unaware of the inappropriateness of their beliefs. Berg's statement on secrecy, however, and caution to parents not to allow their children to partake in sexual play while non-Family members were present, clearly discloses that he was quite aware of the contemporary sexual mores of the time, and the possibility that this play was inappropriate.

In March 1976, Berg wrote and published a letter entitled "Afflictions." In the letter Berg portrayed himself as the prophet who would lead 'his people' into the millennium where they would be free to enjoy a thousand years of sexual freedom. Within this letter, Berg included a graphic depiction of a woman with a large nail driven into her vagina. Berg was making reference to The Family's practice of Flirty Fishing, where women would lure men into the group using their sexuality. Berg states, "When you girls feel their 'Nails' pounding into you, maybe you can think about the nails pounding into Jesus on the cross—Even when it hurts!" (Berg, 1976b, p. 4197). This analogy about sexually active women and Jesus was central to Family doctrine. It is very likely, therefore, that The Family exposed their children to this letter and others with a similar message, or at the very least children in the group saw the letters.

In June 1977, Berg wrote "My Childhood Sex." In this letter he revealed his own childhood sexual experiences with his nanny. He gleefully elaborated on these experiences as having a positive influence that opened up his life to further sexual experimentation at a young age. Here is an excerpt from this letter, where Berg was referring to how his nanny put him to sleep each night by orally masturbating him:

> I don't know what was naughty about it. I enjoyed it! It worked! Look at me. I don't think it did me any harm! Of course if you'd ask any of my enemies, they'd say, "ah Ha see! That's what made him such a sex maniac . . . . [i]t just stands to reason that if it feels good at that age, then the Lord intended for kids to get used to feeling good with sex. If they can have an orgasm at that age, he intended for them to be able to have an orgasm and enjoy it! (Berg, 1977a, p. 5917).

Whether or not Berg's early sexual experience was detrimental to his adult life is not my concern in this study, but one academic has argued that Berg's early sexual trauma linked to his adult sexual deviance. Stephen Kent noted that, "in the Children of God social environment, Berg would 'work out' his childhood sexual traumas through deviant policies and practices that he initiated in the name of God" (Kent, 1996, p. 150).

Encouragement of Sexual Activity Between Children

Berg encouraged children's private experimentation with sexuality, and openly encouraged sexual activity between children. The Mo Letter "Child Brides" (1977), shows Berg's position on the sexual intermixing of his youngest followers. Published on

April 4th 1977, "Child Brides" instructed his young followers to engage in "plenty of sex." He justified this behavior by comparing it with child exploitation practices in India:

> I hope all our young kids have plenty of sex . . . .Why did the Lord make you able to have children at the age of 11, 12 and 13 if you weren't supposed to have sex then . . . . In India they had child brides at 7 years of age! They can get married at that age! Then they could do all the fucking they want without having to worry about any kids till that are 12 years old! (Berg, 1977a, p. 6818-6819).

Berg's remarks on the benefits of marriage and sexual encounters of children at age seven have no merit, and ignore serious questions about physical and mental harm.

Encouragement of Child-Adult Sexual Relationships and Incest

At the present time, The Family discourages child-adult sex, although, The Family cannot deny that some of their earlier writings condoned these behaviors. For example, in "The Devil Hates Sex! -But God Loves it!," Berg advocated sex for all Family members regardless of age and relationship:

> The only way to get free of (the devil) and his lies and his prohibitions and guilt complexes about sex is to get rid of his lies and his lying propaganda, his anti-sex propaganda, and believe the Lord and his word and his creation and God's love and his freedom! -That there is nothing in the world at all wrong with sex as long as it's practiced in love, whatever it is or whoever it's with, no matter who or what age or what relative of what

> manner- and you don't hardly dare even say these words in private . . . We are free in privacy, and that's about all, and we mightn't be free if they discovered what we do in private. . . . . There are no relationship restrictions or age limitations in his law of love . . . . If you hate sex you are one of the devil's crowd (Berg, 1980b, pp. 7694-7708).

This letter advocates adult sexual conduct with children no matter what age or what relationship. Berg always portrayed sexual conduct between adults and children as an act that showed love. He was unable to see such acts as harmful, despite the fact that he knew that this behavior was illegal and considered morally wrong by members of contemporary society.

"The Devil Hates Sex" was not the only letter in which Berg advocated the enjoyment of sexual activity with whomever one desires regardless of age and relationship. In "The Little Girl Dream," written in October 1976, Berg uses an allegorical story comparing his 'young church' to a young girl of ten or eleven:

> All of a sudden, this beautiful, dark haired little girl of about 10 or 11 came and crawled into bed with me! She lay half on top of me, although on her back, and she laid her behind right down on top of my genitals and across my right leg . . . . And I though to myself, "Well, how tempting can you get!" She looked like she really wanted me to make love to her (Berg, 1976, pp.391-392).

The quote shows that Berg had thoughts of making love to a young girl. In this letter he portrayed his new church as one that broke with convention, and one could construe that one of these breaks involved granting followers permission to have sexual relations with young girls.

The Story of Davidito

Another source that illustrates The Family exposed their children to adult sexual activity comes from a book printed as a series of letters from 1975 to 1981, and reprinted as a whole in 1982. Officially written by the Berg family nanny, *The Story of Davidito* is by far the most controversial of all The Family's writings.

At the time of its publication, *The Story of Davidito* served as a child-rearing manual. The collection of Mo Letters provides an insider's view about how Berg and Maria raised Davidito, who was Maria's son from one of her FFing catches. The book served as a prime example of the way that Berg envisaged Family homes should raise their young children. On the surface, it contains many mundane references to clothing, feeding, and discipline, but among the chapters are many references to the young Davidito and his early sexual contact with the adults around him.

Following allegations that the book contained sexually explicit and inappropriate images of adult-child interactions, The Family leadership directed its members to destroy the book. The sect's further response to these allegations was to scapegoat the nanny as the soul culprit for what the book advocated. The book documented harmful sexual

activities done to Davidito, and the destruction of the book did nothing to ameliorate the abuse that this boy suffered.

One part of the book tells of Davidito witnessing a 'come-union,' essentially an orgy, between his parents and others within their inner circle. Davidito at that time was about two years old. In another passage, adults allowed and encouraged the young boy's sexually aggressive behavior:

> He [Davidito] finally found something he thinks the baby is good for--he climbs up on the bed when she is propped there on a pillow and crawls right on top of her and began hunching away! They both love it, really!
>
> Soon afterwards in our next location he [Davidito] made up for lost time with his favourite playmate Davidita [who was the young daughter of the nanny]. He told me, "Sarah gonna have to teach Davidita to like to fuck and not push me away!" Well, I am glad she does not push him away all the time, because the very next night I could not find them after dinner, but spotted them right at the top of the stairs! Banging away on each other! Imagine! It's a good thing she liked it that time! (Berg, 1982, p. 457).

The Family denied responsibility for this series of letters and placed full responsibility for its contents on to Sarah, Davidito's nanny. This assignment of responsibility is unconvincing, however, because Berg approved the contents of the Davidito series, so he has to assume responsibility for it.

Other Evidence of Sexual Exploitation of Children

The Family's written doctrines are not the only sources of evidence that The Family sexually exploited their children. For example, in the letter, "Glorifying God in the Dance" (Berg, 1981, pp. 7914-7946), Berg gave explicit instruction to his female followers to send him tapes of themselves dancing in erotic and sexual ways. Berg went on to give specific instructions that would fulfill his own sexual fantasies. Additionally, Berg openly admitted that he and Maria watched the tapes for sexual stimulation (Berg, 1981, p. 7933). More disturbing, are the references in this letter indicating that Berg encouraged his own granddaughter to perform these dances for him. Although he couched his statement in terms of how it is perfectly natural for young children to dance to music, the dancing he encouraged was done for sexual gratification.

Berg was not the only leader in the group who encouraged inappropriate behavior. Maria, his illegitimate second wife, also had much to say on these issues. Many young teens in The Family often wrote to the group's leaders asking for advice on growing up and dealing with sexual issues. Berg and Maria responded swiftly with letters such as "The Girl who Wouldn't" (Berg, 1978b: p. 5578-5589). This letter was a response to young girls who did not want to partake in sexual activity. When a young girl related in her letter that a church elder had raped her, Maria was quick to tell her that it is a sin to refuse a sexual advance from any man.

There is no doubt that The Family's own writings encouraged sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children, and that Berg and the high leadership in The Family

committed and facilitated child sexual abuse. Although The Family's leadership has offered vague apologies to these young people they have failed to take any further responsibility for their actions.

Physical Maltreatment of Children

Not only were children in The Family at risk for sexual abuse, they also were at risk for physical maltreatment. Using evidence from the Mo Letters, I will show that this mistreatment ranged from social humiliation and physical labour to severe beatings. The Mo Letters gave explicit instruction for the discipline of young children and supplementary evidence comes from academic literature on Family operated 'rehabilitation' programs for teens.

Evidence for Encouragement of Excessive Corporal Punishment

David Berg made his beliefs about corporal punishment very clear in his writings to his followers. Like many of his generation, Berg took the 'dare to discipline' approach to child rearing. In fact, Berg took his discipline techniques to excess.

Written in March 1972, "Home Discipline" is an example of Berg's attitude towards corporal punishment of children. His graphic language only adds to the brutality of his words. His statement also accentuates the use of intimidation along with force:

> Why do you think God says, 'Spare not the rod for his crying?' (Pr.19: 18.) They start yelling long before you sock them with the rod, because they're afraid of the rod and don't want to be spanked! A lot of these

> people will scream louder before they are sentenced than afterwards, trying to forestall punishment (Berg, quoted in Ward, 1995, p. 178).

Berg argued that corporal punishment was the best way to enforce 'his law.' His writings (such as the one above and below) provide examples of Berg's belief that law without enforcement is no law at all.

"Lashes of Love," written in August 1975, again indicated Berg's lack of empathy and compassion for children in the care of his group. Not only did Berg encourage punishment and the denial of mercy, he also enthusiastically described his favorite form of weapon to use on children:

> I usually use a fly swatter. It's a nice handy weapon. If you live in a warm climate like we did, there's always a fly swatter handy because there's always varmits and insects handy. And it made a very handy swatter for our own little varmits as well, only I usually used the handle end, and it does sting, I'll tell you! Sometimes it leaves little red lines too, stripes, but by their stripes they are healed! (Berg, 1975, p. 4687).

The characterization of welts caused from Berg's weapon of punishment as 'healing stripes' is one that is echoed in the conversations on the web site <movingon.org>. Posters tell of their punishments where the leader did not stop until 'healing stripes' appeared on their skin. An excerpt from <movingon.org> demonstrates how some Family members took Berg's writings literally. "I had the sexual abuse happen to me in pretty much a similar pattern and I saw the physical abuse happen, especially to my

stepbrother who could not wear shorts due to the 'healing stripes' (I Believe Jackie, 2003, on-line posting, www.movingon.org).

Berg talked further in "Lashes of Love" about the administration of mercy. He made it clear that parents should not encourage any kind of clemency:

> We feel sorry for the child or babe or whoever it may be because they [sic] seem to be hurt so bad and they yell so loud and you're tempted to stop the spanking a little prematurely before they've learnt their lesson. But don't rescue them prematurely until you're sure the job is done. Now this may sound cruel to you but it's the truth . . . . But with the small children who do not understand an awful lot of reasoning sometimes, you just have to apply the rod . . . . They try to scream real loud at first to make you think you're practically murdering them, and the whole neighbourhood too sometimes. They'll get sympathy from the neighbours if they can, so that you won't spank them as hard as they probably know they need it! I use to tell Mom that the time to stop spanking is not when they they're screaming, its when they stop screaming and beg for mercy! I would start applying the fly swatter, and oh my, how they would scream at first, but then as I really laid it on, if they really deserved it, they would stop that loud yelling and then they began to really beg for mercy, I mean sincerely (Berg, 1975, p. 4685).

Berg's writing about child punishment seems excessive, not only by today's standards. His disregard for the screams of a young child is tantamount to torture. As the previous excerpt shows, Berg often gave his followers examples from within his own home about the proper use of discipline for young children. He set the example he wanted his followers to use when they disciplined their own children. In this way, he made The Family responsible for any use of excessive punishment doled out by the group's adults.

"Child Discipline," written in March 1976, revealed more about Berg's beliefs concerning proper techniques to discipline children. The context for this letter was Berg telling Sara, Davidito's nanny, how to punish children. Davidito at the time was one-and-a half-years old:

> I do think we ought to set up a list of standard rules of chastisement or punishments for children . . . . but if they persist, sock it to'm! But never with such harsh or severe force as to actually injure, only hurt. Do it in love as the Lord does and if you really love them and they know it and love you, they'll eventually keep your commandments! (Berg, quoted in Ward, 1995, p. 180).

Similar to his attitude about childhood sexuality, Berg broached punishment in the name of love and the Lord. He believed that any form of discipline, as long as it was done in the Lord's name, was appropriate, and he openly encouraged his followers to use the same approach.

"Dad on Kidz Correction" (October 1985), is an important letter because many Family members took its message to heart. He again used the argument that acts done in 'love' were always acceptable. The letter states:

> Children need discipline, but it must always be tempered with love and mercy . . . . Those who can't be controlled through love have to be controlled through fear. Love never fails! If it's real love, it won't fail even if it's applying the rod of love. I think you should try everything else you possibly can before applying corporal punishment. But if all else fails, you just have to whack away! What else can you do? You have to use force. God does . . . . He'll whack away until you repent!" (Berg, quoted in Ward, 1995, p. 181).

Grown children posting their stories on <movingon.org> tell of very open and humiliating public beating sessions. In addition to the physical punishment these sessions were a direct form of humiliation and a brutal enforcement of control over their behaviour. Again, Berg's use of crass language reinforces his brutal message. Taken literally, this letter provides evidence for his megalomaniacal nature and his ill-tempered desire to punish unruly behaviour.

The Application of Berg's Discipline—Victor Camps and Teen Training Centers

During the mid-to-late 1980s The Family had a large cohort of children in their teenage years. Many of these teens appeared to lack the enthusiasm of their parents for both The Family and its leader, David Berg. To counter this lack of enthusiasm The

Family developed what it called Teen Training Camps, and (for the most resistant teens) Victor Camps in countries such as Brazil, Denmark, England, Japan, Macao, Mexico, Norway, The Philippines, Scotland, Switzerland, Thailand, and many South American countries (Kent, 2000: 57). Kent noted that these organization-run programs were an attempt to heighten commitment to the founder, David Berg. He also remarks that this lack of enthusiasm by the second generation is a classic problem that confronts sects such as The Family (Kent, 2000, p. 57).

Academic studies conducted of The Family largely ignore Teen Training Programs and Victor Camps, at most only mentioning them briefly (see Kent and Hall, 1999). Justice Ward, however, in an English High Court of Justice case, discussed many of these programs in his child-custody decision. What follows is a discussion of Justice Ward's findings as well as evidence gathered by Kent (1999), which shows how the group applied Berg's teachings about corporal punishment.

Background to the Teen Training Camps and Victor Program

Kent (1999) noted that by the early 1980s it seems that a number of teens in The Family were having grave doubts about following in their parents' footsteps. The Victor Programs and Teen Training camps were The Family's attempts to instill a deep commitment among young people whose faith was wavering. Officially, Teen Training Camps and Victor Programs ran for a period of eighteen months in 1989-1990. Unofficially, people have reported being in camps from as early as 1986 and as late as 1991.

Berg sent his own granddaughter, Merry, to a Teen Training Camp in Macao in April 1987. For three and a half years, Merry remained at this facility, which by the beginning of 1988 become known as teen detention camp. Most of the teens were family members of The Family's elite World Service. In her testimony in the custody case, Merry stated that she was locked in a room for six months, was on hard labor seven days a week, and was on silence restriction. Moreover, adults (shepherds and shepherdesses) inflicted beatings to her with a wooden paddle (Ward, 1995, pp.124-130).

Kent's interview with Merry Berg shows that she had a growing disillusionment with her grandfather because of the behavior she witnessed while living with him for several years in various households (Kent, 2000, 65). Justice Ward heard Merry's testimony about the time she spent in a teen detention Centre in Macao and called it a "form of torture" (Ward, 1995, p. 152).

The largest of all the Victor Programs was called the "Jumbo" and was in the Philippines. Here, young people reported that armed guards patrolled the grounds, and its inmates operated under a strict demerit system. As it did at other facilities, this demerit system often ended with silence restriction or paddling (Ward, 1995, p. 153).

Conclusion

The Children of God's first followers in the late 1960s and early 1970s joined when they were very young, in their late teens and early twenties. The sect appealed to these young people because of their unconventional and idealistic views that differed so

much from the mainstream society of their parents. Berg and The Children of God offered these young people an alternative to the America of their parents.

Berg's doctrines of free love and strict rules against birth control meant that many of these young people soon became parents. Berg and The Family leadership created large school homes so that their followers could continue to fulfill their missionary duties. Being raised away from their parents and extended family was the normal upbringing for the large majority of children of The Family. Berg, through the Mo Letters, dictated the rules and regulations for each one of these school homes. Adherence to Berg's doctrines was essential for Family members, so most Family members followed Berg's child rearing policies explicitly.

This chapter has provided evidence that The Family, during the late 1970s and into the late 1980s, exposed many young people to various detrimental forms of abuse. Although not all the young people who belonged to The Family in this period suffered abuse, all of them were at risk.

Chapter Three: A Theoretical Overview of On-line Support

This chapter provides a foundation for understanding how support groups operate and offers evidence that Internet support groups have a similar supportive function. It then elaborates on the initial hypothesis that the members of <movingon.org> who have experienced abusive situations use the website as a virtual support group.

As social animals, humans seek to create supportive and caring communities. Our nature is to pursue social activities. This pursuit has helped us evolve and adapt throughout history. At one time, humans relied on their social bonds for survival, working together in search of fire, shelter, and food. Without these interconnections, humans simply would not have survived. For the majority of us, hunting and building shelters are no longer necessities, but the instinctual longing for another human's company does not wane. Throughout the modern era we have remained social animals. We rely on our families, neighbors, and friends for support, companionship, and love. As we progress toward the postmodern era the challenge to build social communities remains. Although our world continually changes, our basic nature remains the same.

We adapt well to these changes. Through the use of the Internet we create communities that escape time and space. We now share human bonds across vast amounts of distance, giving support to those we have never met in person. In short, we are adapting our propensity for community building.

A social community serves many functions. Along with financial and physical requirements, humans need emotional support. Harry Wasserman and Holly E. Danforth (1988) found that "people can become physically, mentally, or socially debilitated if they do not receive or perceive signs from significant others that can make them feel safe and valued"(Wasserman and Danforth, 1988, p.7). We are not solitary creatures; we narrate our lives to friends, hoping to gain supportive advice and understanding from those we confide in. Precisely because of our nature, the study of social support is important.

Developed by the military in World War II group therapy blurred the boundaries between social and therapeutic support. Since that time, group therapy remains an effective and economical treatment for a variety of problems. Traditionally, group therapy involves a small group of individuals in an informal setting (Carson et al., 2000, p. 669). Clinically dynamic groups consist of at least one formal facilitator, whereas socially supportive groups may or may not have a formal facilitator. Often groups known as self-help groups, mutual aid groups, or social support groups are ones without formal leadership. Deborah L. Finfgeld's research found that social support groups are a "nontraditional but an affordable mental health care alternative" (Finfgeld, 2000, p. 241). Indeed, self-help groups assist in relieving some of the burden created by the high demand for clinical supportive therapy.

Social Support Groups: A Definition

In his book, *Self Help in America: A Social Perspective* (1993), Alfred A. Katz discusses two primary types of self-help groups. These are twelve step groups (for

example, Alcoholics Anonymous) and non-twelve step groups (which are support groups for non-clinical, emotionally stressing problems). Within his study, he found that both types of groups are created for basically similar reasons and both share many common features in their programs and activities (Katz, 1993, p. 18). Earlier, Levy in 1973 classified four types of self-help groups. These were: groups that aim to help people control and finally subdue their socially unacceptable and self-destructive behavior; groups designed to enhance personal growth; groups of people undergoing a common life stress and predicament; and groups formed at once to defend an embattled minority (Levy, quoted in Wasserman and Danforth, 1988, p. 24). Wasserman and Danforth's research on self-help groups found that Americans most often seek help from a wide array of "natural helpers," many of whom are non-professional laypersons.

There are numerous personal reasons why individuals may decide to join a self-help group. Two primary reasons found in the literature are to battle against isolation, depression, and self-hatred, and the failure of mental health professionals to address either the needs and/or concerns for particular populations (Wasserman and Danforth, 1988, p. 24). Academic literature shows that self-help, mutual aid, and social support groups consist of people facing life difficulties who come together to help themselves and others (Fallot and Haris, 2002; Wasserman and Danforth, 1988; Katz, 1993; Salem et al., 1997).

In writing about support groups, Wasserman and Danforth quoted Caplan stating that support groups consist of three elements: "significant others help the individual

mobilize his psychological resources and master his emotional blinders; they share his tasks; [and] they provide him with extra supplies of money, materials, tools, skill, and cognitive guidance to improve his handling of the situation" (Caplan, quoted in [redacted]erman and Danforth, 1988, p. 8). Therefore, although people join for numerous reasons they develop a consensus about the gains that they receive.

Characteristics of Support Groups

The research on the numerous types of support groups is highly consistent in their discussions of their characteristics. In his thorough study of support groups, Alfred Katz (1993) found seven common characteristics. These are: cognitive restructuring, learning new adaptive skills, emotional support, personal disclosures, social support, taking action for a common cause, and self-esteem building. Cognitive restructuring occurs when a person undergoes a change in perception and understanding of the current problem, and this new understanding influences behavior. The wide mixture of people in the group, who are at different stages of dealing with their problems, help other members learn new adaptive skills. Katz found that emotional support was the most widely sought-after and widely provided category. He found that people generally look to support groups for positive reinforcement, sharing, offers of feedback, reassurance of competence, justification, mutual affirmation, empathy, normalization, instillation of hope, and catharsis. Due to the perception of confidentiality, Katz found that many people look to support groups as a place where they can feel free to make disclosures of personal feelings, thoughts, emotions, or fantasies. He found that support groups provide social

support and prevent social isolation. Furthermore, support groups are places where people can take a combined action for a common cause; they provide a venue to raise funds and publicize the importance of the problem. Finally, Katz found that support groups influence how members feel about themselves. He found that members felt a sense of empowerment, self-reliance, and self-esteem, due to the appraisal of others in the group (Katz, 1993, pp. 25-28).

Consistent with Katz's findings, Deborah Salem and her colleagues found several types of functional support within mutual help groups: emotional support, cognitive guidance, advice and information, and companionship and friendship (Salem et al., 1997, p. 189). This research reinforces views that support groups function as an important component to the mental health of the individuals involved in them. A question that remains, however, is whether social support groups are effective in helping?

Effectiveness of Support Groups

Empirical research has shown that support groups provide many helping functions. For example, Maton (1988) found that members who both gave and received support regarded themselves and their groups more positively when compared to those who were primarily givers or receivers of support (Maton, 1988, p. 53). Fallot and Haris (2002) concluded that women survivors of childhood sexual abuse involved in a supportive group experienced increased overall functioning, decreased psychiatric symptoms, decreased hospitalization and emergency room use, and decreasing HIV risk behavior (Fallot and Haris, 2002, p. 483). Finally, Roberts and Rappaport (1989) found

that among members of mutual help organizations for persons with mental illness, those who helped others reported more improvement in social adjustment that those who did not (Roberts and Rappaport, 1989). Support groups, therefore, are indeed helpful not only for those receiving help but also for those who offer the help.

Social Support Goes On-Line

Humans have shown a tremendous capacity for adapting to their ever-changing environment. A majority of North Americans spend a good deal of time interacting with some type of technology. A common discourse of modern technology is that the more interaction we have with our computers the less interaction we have with each other. Research, however, reveals otherwise. Finfgeld reported in 1997 that approximately 18 million adults in the United States sought health-related information on the Internet. Furthermore, one out of four individuals who search the World Wide Web for information about diseases participate in on-line support groups (Finfgeld, 2000, p. 242). It appears, therefore, that we have adapted to this new inter-linked world, and that support groups continue to flourish, even on-line. The question remains, however, whether on-line support groups are similar to traditional support groups. In order to answer this question we must examine the structure and function of on-line support groups, and then compare them to more traditional means of group support.

An Overview of On-Line Support Groups

The literature dedicated to research about on-line support groups suggests two types of structural formats. Wright and Bell (2003) identify these two formats as

synchronous and asynchronous. The synchronous format refers to real-time interactions; those familiar with this type of format will know them as 'chat' rooms. Within this type of group, people post to others within the room and receive immediate feedback. The other format, asynchronous, is not in real time. Here, people use a type of bulletin board to post messages. Users post messages either to ask questions to others or to offer support in response to already posted questions. Research shows that users of both of these types of formats prefer the asynchronous format because they enjoy the convenience of the time delay, for it is often difficult to find shared time due to different schedules and time zones (Wright and Bell, 2003, p. 47).

Similar to Wright's and Bell's discussion of format, Finfgeld sees two forms of support groups that exist on-line. The comprehensive version offers a variety of services such as an interactive support group, encyclopedia-type reference materials, 'ask an expert' and assessment services, decision analysis and planning exercises, and individually tailored modification guidelines. The other form of support group is an interactive one, developed by either professionals or laypersons. Its primary purpose is to provide a forum in which individuals with similar concerns can support each other. Membership is voluntary, and individuals can come and go as they please (Finfgeld, 2000, p. 243). The structural analysis of on-line support groups is necessary although not sufficient for the identification of function in on-line support groups. For this purpose, we must further examine how these groups provide support.

Is On-Line Support Supportive?

Barry Wellman and his colleagues (1996) wrote, "members of the virtual community want to link globally with kindred souls for companionship, information, and social support from their homes and workstations" (Wellman et al., 1996, p. 214). Kevin Wright and Sally Bell (2003) describe computer mediated support groups as 'weak tie' networks. Weak tie networks/relationships/communities typically take place among individuals who communicate on a daily basis, but are not necessarily close. Members of weak tie communities are individuals to whom a person could turn during times of stress when closer ties (i.e. friends and family members) are unavailable. Weak tie communities serve diverse functions such as access to information, facilitating disclosure of risky topics, or topics perceived to have a negative social stigma (Wright and Bell, 2003, p. 41). Wright and Bell's research shows that weak tie relationships tend to be more heterogeneous than closer networks and better connected to other more diverse social circles, which makes the different types of information more accessible. Wellman et al. (1996) also discusses computer mediated support groups as weak tie networks. Their research found that weak tie relationships develop their own distinct culture. These unique communities usually consist of people who have never met face-to-face, but provide reciprocal support and information. Furthermore, the weak tie community is a means of increasing self-esteem, demonstrating expertise, earning respect and status, and responding to norms of mutual aid (Wellman et al., 1996, p. 223).

Research supports similarities between the traditional support groups and online support groups due to the shared discourse about community building, supportive empathetic responses, and sharing of information. Discussions of online support groups are not complete, however, without a thorough examination of both their advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages and Disadvantages of On-Line Support Groups

Researchers studying on-line support groups suggest numerous potential advantages for computer mediated on-line support. The biggest advantage of on-line support groups is their convenience. People using these groups have the ability to send and receive messages twenty-four hours a day from almost anywhere in the world. This ability is especially beneficial for rural clients who may be unable to receive support from traditional support groups in larger urban centers. Furthermore, individuals with varying degrees of disabilities, and the elderly, may find on-line support groups advantageous because they do not have to rely on transportation or environmental conditions (Barrera et al., 2002; Finfgeld, 2000; Finn and Lavitt, 1994; Sullivan, 2003; Taylor and Luce, 2003; Wright and Bell, 2003). On-line support groups also can reduce the risk of isolation by establishing positive relationships and creating of a sense of community with others facing similar problems.

Often cited as an advantage is the anonymity that on-line support provides. Research suggests that a high level of anonymity and the obfuscation of sociodemographic factors such as age, race, and income help people to overcome some of

the interpersonal discomfort that can occur in face-to-face groups (Finfgeld, 2000, p. 248). The anonymity of an on-line support group allows individuals to be valued for the strength of their contributions rather than evaluations on their physical appearance or disabilities (Berrera et al., 2002, p. 638). Additionally, the absence of face-to-face interaction lessens negative cues in non-verbal communications, such as body language and voice tone.

Particularly advantageous are asynchronous formats. The bulletin-board-like format allows senders to be mindful of their own thoughts prior to writing and sending them to the message board. Finfgeld suggests that this hesitancy may be beneficial because it distances individuals from potentially impulsive, irrational, and/or destructive emotions (Finfgeld, 2000, p. 248). Wright and Bell found that individuals feel therapeutic value in formulating healthy self-disclosures in written form (Wright and Bell, 2003, p. 49). Furthermore, because this type of writing happens in solitude, there may be a heightened sense of self-awareness for the individual.

Due to the static nature of the asynchronous format, Braithwaite (1999) found that individuals often post messages that relay negative emotions in non-conventional ways (such as poetry), which allows for creative efforts in supportive activities (Braithwaite, 1999, p. 135).

Another possible advantage is the ability to lurk[5] until one is comfortable with the group milieu. Lurking without posting allows individuals to receive help even though they may be uncomfortable in posting their own messages (Finfgeld, 2000, p.249, Finn and Lavitt, 1994, p.35). Finally, lurking allows individuals to have more direct control over the type and amount of support they would like to receive. Users of the group may skip, skim, or ignore posted messages, or they simply can close the page and turn off the computer if they do not wish to go further with their private issue (Sullivan, 2003, p. 86).

On-line support groups provide users with many advantages. Remaining cognizant, however, of the possible disadvantages is also of concern because they may determine the ultimate benefit of on-line support groups to the individual.

There are some important disadvantages of computer mediated support groups. Computer usage has greatly increased throughout the last decade. Because personal computer usage appears to be closely related to education and income, the possibility exists that many people may not have access and thus cannot benefit from this resource. Economic factors that prohibit usage may mean that online support group members are less diverse than assumed (Finfgeld, 2000, 250). Publicly available Internet portals at institutions such as public libraries, universities, and hospitals may overcome some of this negativity, but it is by far one of the biggest disadvantages of on-line support.

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[5]Lurking refers to entering the 'chat room' or message center and reading others' posts. Other members are not aware of a lurker's presence.

Although in many ways the lack of face-to-face contact is an advantage, the possibility exists that there could be gross inaccuracies about demographic factors because they are masked. Wright and Bell (2003) found that this environment with its limited non-verbal cues makes it difficult to assess the validity of information; therefore members may question others' credibility. In preliminary studies, they found evidence that perceptions of credibility may be related to perceptions of social support (Wright and Bell, 2003, p. 46). Fabrication of identity, therefore, makes no difference to others in the group; it is the support that someone offers to another that makes the difference.

The time it takes to establish trust, warmth, and concern among group members and the inappropriate usage of the support group by inauspicious members, called 'flamers,' are commonly cited disadvantages to on-line supportive communities. Finfgeld (2000) found that on-line support group members do not take longer to establish interpersonal impressions of each other than groups whose members meet once a week. And although 'flamers' are troublesome for all aspects of all on-line usage, most support groups have system-operators who can deal directly with potential deleterious postings. Furthermore, the application of informally developed group norms tends to subdue aggressive members. For example, members may choose to ignore or block a message sender (Finfgeld, 2000, p. 250).

A serious disadvantage to on-line support is lag times between posts. Highly distressed individuals may not receive the support they desire when they need it. This is also a concern for traditional face-to-face groups that meet on a weekly basis. To counter

this problem, it may be necessary for on-line support group system-operators to post telephone support phone numbers or to encourage people to privately e-mail other group members. Another drawback is that individuals may forgo seeking professional help for highly serious afflictions. For example, on-line support groups may exacerbate Internet addiction and social isolation for those affected by psychiatric disorders such as obsessive compulsive disorder or agoraphobia (Finfgeld, 2000, p. 250).

Many researchers hypothesize extensively on the potential advantages and disadvantages of on-line support groups, but there is little empirical research in this area (Wright and Bell, 2003, pp. 50-51). Because computer mediated support groups are a fairly new phenomena, future research will need to focus on the advantages and disadvantages of the content and effectiveness of them.

Research Issues

Available research on computer mediated support groups provides extensive study on their structure, but many of these same researchers call for additional, well-designed research to evaluate their therapeutic efficacy (Finfgeld, 2000, pp. 251-253). For example, Taylor and Luce (2003) assert, "research is needed to compare the advantages and disadvantages between face-to-face groups, to determine which patients benefit from modality, compare the effectiveness of professionally moderated groups and self-or-peer-directed groups, and compare the effectiveness of synchronous and asynchronous groups" (Taylor and Luce, 2003, p. 22).

There is also very little research on what factors influence how participants communicate social support within the on-line group (Wright and Bell, 2003, p. 50). Claire Sullivan et al. maintain that it is important to investigate the benefits and drawbacks of on-line support communities (Sullivan et al., 2003, p. 84). An appropriate way to inquire into the communication of support, Sullivan et al. suggest, is phenomenological thematic analysis. A phenomenological study would examine various discourses within the support group. Cline states that there is scant research that has focused on group dialogue and interaction within these groups, and a need exists for research that describes, analyses, and explains the effects of communication behavior within the support group context (Cline, 1999).

Conclusion

Research question one of this thesis asks if the website <movingon.org> functions as an on-line support group. If so, then an analysis of the thematic content would reveal the common characteristics of traditional support groups along with the structural format of on-line support groups. The on-line group's content would provide incidents where members who share a common life experience would disclose personal information, offer emotional and social support, and offer feedback to other posters. The group's structure would display either a synchronous or asynchronous format and would exhibit a weak tie community structure.

What follows are the results of the inquiries about the web site <movingon.org>. The research addresses the hypothesis, that this website serves, for it members, as a

virtual support group. I then examined how participants conveyed support in this unique virtual setting.

As noted, there is little empirical work on the supportive content of on-line support groups. The second research question of this thesis seeks to explore the discourse of on-line support.

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

Analysis

Created on July 23, 2001, the website, <movingon.org>, is an interactive forum created by and for the adult children who have left The Family. The website allows readers to access topics relevant to the ex-members who predominate on of the forum. The website asserts, "Welcome to Moving on –The website created by and for young adults with parents who joined the religious organization The Family/Children of God. Pull up a chair and stay awhile—Browse, read, rant, write, whatever" (<movingon.org> June 09,2003). The topics included on the home page banner are: Getting Out, Getting On, Getting Real, Getting Support, Getting in Touch, and Getting Through. Each of these sections contains asynchronous message boards on several sub-topics. Readers can choose a thread[6] to read, post replies to others, ask questions, and give advice.

The aims of this thesis are to determine if <movingon.org> serves as a virtual support group, and if it does, to understand how participants create supportive discourse. Using thematic content analysis and discourse analysis, I can assess the characteristics of support on <movingon.org>. After the identification of these characteristics I then can examine the rhetorical strategies that constitute these characteristics. This preliminary analysis will allow for an understanding of how the posters on <movingon.org> create a

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[6]A thread is a written interchange of conversation between two or more readers/posters on the website.

supportive place where they can share their feelings and offer suggestions of help to others with similar concerns.

The members of <movingon.org> use the web site to discuss various topics that address many aspects of their childhoods spent in The Family. This research project explores one particular poster's key experiences and shows how, through written interactions, the website's members created a supportive on-line community.[7]

Support groups exist for numerous reasons, often addressing social, physical, and mental health problems (Salem et al., 1997). Although <movingon.org> is a virtual space, members openly discuss difficult and serious topics (such as rape and physical punishment). While many posters know each other, most do not. Because of the highly emotional nature of some of the website's commentaries, I chose to examine discourse in a particular virtual room, known as 'creeps.' Discussions in this room focused on the topics of sexual and physical abuse. Many posters recounted and analyzed their experience of abuse at the hands of top Family leadership. Other members then posted replies to the initial story and, often, a conversational exchange ensued.

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[7]I use the term community here to identify a group of people who share a similar problems of concern and who come together to discuss and share them.

Initial Findings

RQ1: Does <movingon.org> function as a support group?

The preliminary content analysis of the conversations or 'threads' of the room 'creeps' sought to uncover some of the common themes within the website members' talk. This analysis served as a pilot study to help identify the conceptual orientation of the main discussions. In turn, this conceptual orientation allowed me first to choose a thread that contained many of the characteristics of support and then to subject it to further analysis. While some conversations were relatively short (one to two paragraphs) others were lengthy (ranging to twenty-five pages of talk). The length of the conversations was inconsequential as even the shortest of conversations may contain valuable information. This initial content analysis allowed for a visual survey, through the use of matrices, about the thematic content discussed in the thread, enabling me to speculate about the reasons people use the website.

For this project, I used Deborah Salem et al.'s (1997) empirically derived coding categories. The purpose of Salem et al.'s study was to describe the interactions that take place in an on-line mutual-help group and to explore whether computer based mutual-help groups (support, and social support groups[8]) operate in a manner similar to traditional face-to-face support groups (Salem et al., 1997, p.190). Salem et al. used

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[8]The contemporary research about on-line support groups uses these terms interchangeably.

concepts and operational definitions from empirical research on mutual help and social support to develop their coding categories.

Gery W. Ryan and H. Russell Bernard define classical content analysis as a technique that reduces texts a to unit-by-unit-variable matrix. Then the researcher analyzes this matrix quantitatively to test hypotheses. Unlike grounded theory or phenomenology, content analysis assumes the discovery and description of the codes of interest prior to analysis (Ryan and Bernard, 2000, p. 785). This project initially used ten of Salem et al.'s thirteen coding categories (see Appendix Two).

Using the qualitative analysis software 'InVivo,' I categorized all the thematic content of twenty conversational threads in the virtual room, 'creeps.' I used only ten of Salem's et al's original codes to comprise the matrix. These were: Emotional Support, Advice and Information, Cognitive Guidance, Disclosure, Request for Feedback, Agreement, Disagreement/Negative, Humor, Referent Power, and Structure and Process.

I left out the category, Types of Knowledge because I assumed that the postings were made predominately by non-professional laypersons. In hindsight, this decision was a mistake, because after I completed the coding I did see ample evidence of posters sharing second-hand experiential knowledge.

I generated matrices by collecting all the coded material. For example, each time I encountered one of Salem et al.'s supportive characteristics I coded this section of text. I then summed the findings and put them into the matrices. As seen in Appendix Three,

the written thread 'horror' contains many incidences (108 in total) of the supportive characteristics that by Salem et al defined.

The results of the content analysis show that the broad category of Social Support--containing subcategories of Advice and Information, Cognitive Guidance, and Emotional Support--was most prevalent (n=121). The broad category of Help Seeking and Disclosure, with the subcategories Disclosure and Feedback, was second with n=74 sections coded. These were followed by Affective Responses (Agreement, Negative, and Humor) n=53, and Group Structure (Referent Power and Structure/Process) n=7.

The conversational thread, 'horror,' contained the most incidents of support themes, with Social Support coded 49 times, Help Seeking and Disclosure coded 25 times, Affective Responses coded 30 times, and Group Structure/Identification coded 4 times (See Appendix Three).

In addition to Salem et al.'s thirteen categories, I coded nine additional categories that were idiosyncratic to this particular website. The nine categories are: (1) Abuse in The Family, (2) Anger, (3) Brainwashing,(4) The Davidito Book, (5) Denial of Sexual Abuse, (6) Family Literature, (7) Identity Transformation, (8) Rectifying Misinformation, and (9) Victor Programs (see Appendix Four).

Using the initial coding scheme in combination with the additional codes allowed for the identification of conversations particularly rich in supportive themes. Because of the high incidents of these themes in conversations, I was able to affirm that the conversational thread, 'horror,' in the virtual room, 'creeps,' displayed similar

characteristics to other on-line support communities. Therefore, I felt I could positively affirm that it was serving a supportive function. Due to this finding, I subjected 'horror' to a deeper analytic exploration.

Although Salem et al.'s methods are sufficient for understanding the types and thematic content of support, this methodology is insufficient in identifying the discursive methods that create a supportive environment. Potter and Wetherell note that content analysis is useful only where the researcher understands primarily as an indicator of something "lying beyond" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 41). Potter and Wetherell's discourse analysis takes the theoretical position that language is an essentially functional medium. Therefore, context plays an important role in the constructed meaning of terms (Potter and Wetherell. 1987, p. 41). They note that the broad categories generated by content analysis, such as Salem et al.'s, easily can obscure theoretically interesting differences in discourse (Potter and Wetherell, 1984, p. 41). Content analysis allows for the assessment of the convenient dependent variables that it creates (the codes). The researcher then can examine the numerical occurrences of the codes. Potter and Wetherell state that the difference between content analysis and discourse analysis is that "content analysis lacks the theory of language as an active, performative realm" (Potter and Wetherell, 1984, p. 173).

Salem et al. note the limitations of content analysis as well, and state that future research might examine interaction patterns between participants, and that this analysis

"would better explicate the helping processes that take place in these groups" (Salem et al., 1997, p. 202).

RQ2: How do members of <movingon.org> communicate support to each other?

A better choice is discourse analysis where context plays an important role. The type of discourse analysis I chose for the project is one borrowed from discursive psychology, in particular, from the work of Jonathan Potter and Margaret Wetherell (1987). Theoretically this type of discourse analysis relies on the tenet that there are no cognitive mechanisms in side oneself, but rather peoples it is the use of language that makes something real. This type of discourse analysis holds the principle that people construct their own social realties through their created conversations.

The major components of Potter and Wetherell's discourse analysis include function, construction, and variation. *Function* refers to the argument that people use language to *do* things (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 32). In the analysis of function, however, it is not sufficient to simply categorize pieces of speech; one must also consider the context in which the discourse takes place. When using this type of discourse analysis one must remember to examine both explicit and implicit ways people use to persuade, accuse, and request (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 32). Therefore, in my thesis, I chose to look at the direct and indirect ways that people display support.

Construction in discourse analysis refers to the belief that people may not consciously construct but nonetheless still actively construct accounts of phenomena through the use of language (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 34). The construction of the

account emerges as people try to make sense of phenomena. Discourse analysis holds that "all language, even language which passes as simple description, is constructive and consequential" (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 34). In my thesis I used discourse analysis to examine how posters on <movinon.org> use written language to construct a supportive community.

Because individuals construct language, it will then be quite *variable*. Therefore, language is more ambiguous than realistic. (Potter and Wetherell note that although many descriptions of an event are consistent, often researchers overstate this consistency by ignoring the various aggregating techniques that people use). Additionally, there is no reason to suppose that consistency in accounts is an indicator for descriptive validity (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 34).

Inspired by ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts, discursive psychology examines the negotiation of meaning in the interactions of everyday life. Discursive psychologists look at how people communicate and how people create meaningful contexts for their lives. All of the units of analysis in discursive psychology are forms of spoken interaction (both formal and informal) and written text (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 7). By incorporating discourse analysis to the conversational threads of <movingon.org> I gain a greater understanding of how these young people construct their social worlds and create a supportive community.

My analysis of supportive communication examined how people in the group responded to a young woman named jackie (with a small j). The thread begins with a

commentary written by jackie about her alleged experience with sexual molestation, rape, and physical punishment at the hands of The Family's second-rung leadership. The pattern of supportive communication occurred in two ways, explicitly and implicitly. I classified the first patterns of supportive communication as 'direct' communication. These are commentaries where support appears to be the main goal of the respondent. The respondents directly conveyed support for jackie. The second type of supportive communication, I called 'indirect' communication. This supportive discourse contained many of the same supportive themes as the 'direct,' but, the posters did not make their supportive comments explicit. The conversational thread begin with jackie's initial post (see appendix three for the full post) followed by replies by other group members.[9] What follows is how jackie chose to end her posting.

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[9]I left postings by jackie and all other group members in their original state. Any spelling mistakes or grammatical errors found in the postings occurred in the original posting on the website.

jackie's original post:

JUST MY IMAGINATION

(1)[10] - from jackie-Thursday, August 21, 2003

There are a lot more things that I would be able to write about but I just don't have the time to keep on right now and don't want to bore you all. According The Family this is all in the past and in my case I was told that it was just my imagination and blah. As I wrote in other articles I still wait for TF [The Family] to acknowledge our existence and our pain! The Family has no right to talk about love because they know it not!! I hope that we will somehow find a way to get over all the hurt and be able to re-build our lives. To The Family and their perverted blood-sucking leaders I just wish them to BURN IN HELL! Here is the story of my imagination! Mine and so many others personal safari through hell!

All responses in this conversational thread are replies to jackie's initial posting. By supplying this initial posting I hope to provide the reader the essential contextual backdrop of my discourse analysis, thereby providing more validity to my findings.

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[10]Numbers in front of each posting indicate if this is the first, second, third, etc. posting from this person. The second numbers, in brackets, indicates the paragraph number within the posting.

Results and Discussion

Direct

1. Sympathetic Comments

Immediately following jackie's posting of her personal account, some posters chose to let jackie know that they feel sorry for what she experienced. Posters used the words "I am sorry for you" to let jackie know that they empathized with her situation and experience. This type of response is similar to what advocates of traditional support groups call 'showing empathy' (Wassermann and Danforth, 1988). In traditional supportive therapy, one of the most supportive techniques available to the formal leader is the appropriate use of empathy. Wassermann and Danforth state, " [b]y demonstrating empathetic responses, the worker not only enters the isolated world of the member but models the concept of mutuality for the rest of the group" (Wassermann and Danforth, 1988: 172). A sympathetic response, such as "I am sorry for you" served as a way to show jackie that she is not alone in her feelings. Furthermore, both Braithwaite et al. (1999) and Salem et al. (1997) found that empathetic responses were common in their studies of on-line support groups. In fact they found that, giving emotional support through empathetic remarks was a prominently cited category in both their content analyses. Braithwaite et al. found that 40% of the total support behaviours were expressions of emotional support. In a similar study, Salem et al. found that 49% of all their postings showed some type of social support, with 22% of these being expressions of emotional support. Salem et al. affirm that, "These types of comments are typically

thought to characterise interactions in mutual help groups" (Salem et al., 1997; Katz, 1993). Provided below are examples from <movingon.org> of the types of sympathetic responses that others gave to jackie following her initial post.

2(1) from Christina

Friday, August 22, 2003 - 05:52

I just wanted to say that you have my deepest sympathies. No one should ever have to go through the horrors you have experienced.

(1)from Mir

Friday, August 22, 2003- 06:59

Jackie,

I am so sorry. These people ARE going to burn in hell, and I firmly believe that people who commit these terrible acts also suffer in this life.

2. Statements of Caring and Support

Many respondents to jackie simply stated that they support her and cared for her. These responses added to the already established feelings of emotional support that many of the posters conveyed to jackie. Salem et al.'s definition of emotional support involved comments that express nurturing. Salem et al. found that in traditional support groups "emotional support is empathic; it seeks to nurture, encourage, and bolster another" (Salem et al., 1997, p. 190). The following are typical statements from <movingon.org> that convey caring and support.

(5) From JudasChrist

Sunday, August 24, 2003, 14:19

Truth Jackie, and I (amongst others), support and feel like U do and feel bad for U...I feel bad that we all wnet through abuses.

(1) from Kate.

Monday, August 25, 2003 - 08:07

Anyway, take care Jackie.....I think the step taken to write these things down is a hard one, but I also believe that it's part of our healing process.

These posters used "take care" in a similar way that they used " I feel sorry for you" to express sympathy. Both responses allowed posters to express empathy toward jackie.

3. Statements of Understanding

(1) from Kate.

Monday, August 25, 2003 - 08:07

I just want to say that I totally understand what you must have gone through.

The phrase, "I understand" is another way that posters expressed empathy for jackie. The above posting is typical of this type of written response. Braithwaite et al. (1999) and Salem et al. (1997) found that expressions of understanding were common in their study of on-line social support and allowed for displays of empathy. Braithwaite et al. stated that, "the category of understanding included messages of empathy, stressing the similarity of one person's experiences with another's" (Braithwaite et al., 1999, p. 9).

4. Statements Conveying Shared Experience

Statements such as those below disclosed an important element of social support, which involves combating social and emotional isolation. These statements provided evidence that for the members of <movingon.org>, it is important to express sharing of their experiences, as well as to let each other know that they are not alone and that others have gone through similar experiences. Wassermann and Danforth (1988) mentioned that combating loneliness through the "reparation of old ties or the creation of new ones or a combination of both are the usual prescriptions for a good outcome" (Wassermann and Danforth, 1988: 40). By making the statement, "you are not alone," respondents told jackie that they too share her feelings and she need not feel as if she is alone in her experiences with The Family.

7 (1) From I believe Jackie

Saturday, August 23, 2003, 16:04

But you are not alone. More of us have gone through the same, in far-flung corners of the world.

(1) From Jules

Saturday, August 23, 2003, 20:27

Though it may be small comfort, please know you are not alone.

5. Statements of Belief

(1) from venusbutterfly

Friday, August 22, 2003 - 08:57

i was wondering...are there any of you (or is it just me) who sometimes have a difficult time being able to tell as a fact what sort of abuse you went through? I mean, we've (or I) been told so many times that no such thing happenned, that even though i don't have the faintest idea why i'd just make up something as horrible as that, i can't say it happenned as a fact....or maybe my subconcious mind has just worked so hard protecting my sanity that it has burried all those memories to lesen the pain....i don't know, but was just wondering...

In response

6 (2) from anovagrrl

Friday, August 22, 2003 - 15:56

I believe your story. It happened. You didn't make it up.

Many people responded to jackie's story with statements of belief. At first glance, one might imagine that these statements are responses to questions and statements that doubt jackie's story. Further analysis of the discourse context, however, refuted this idea. The analysis of the above discussion showed that, prior to the first statement of belief, one poster pondered the nature of childhood memories and how much people can trust them.

This statement led some posters to reinforce jackie's memory, by telling her that they believe her story.

Salem et al. labeled these types of responses as 'Affective Responses' showing 'agreement.' Salem et al. stated that, "these comments show agreement, acceptance, support, or compliance with a prior posting" (Salem et al., 1997, p. 206).

The second way that statements of belief arose within the group's discourse is when someone questioned jackie about the truthfulness of her story, and then accused her of embellishing some parts of her original post. In the following example, Spat questioned jackie about some details of her story and a discussion ensued about the function and appropriateness of these types of comments. Finally, Joe decided to respond directly to jackie, again by offering her reassurance of belief.

(1) from Spat

Saturday, August 23, 2003 - 15:28

I feel for you Jackie we all had abuse while in the group. Nevertheless there are points in your story I find hard to believe. Especially regarding the spanking I mean I do believe you got spankings we all did. Maybe you all will think I'm an asshole. But I played football in High school and in a minor league and if your story is right and you can find bruises on a body 2 months later without broken bones or actual cuts I'll be dammed. Sorry again but I just thought you make zero sense there. Again I apologise but I find parts of your story hard to believe.

Followed by Joe

(3) From Joe H

Sunday, August 31, 2003, 02:05

I just wanted to say, in case I didn't make it clear before, that I believe you completely Jackie. That kind of shit happened all the time, it was most definitely NOT out of the ordinary.

Joe is not just replying to Spat's post but is adding to one of his earlier posts in which he stated that he felt that asking jackie questions to clarify her story was appropriate. His post indicated he felt the need to tell jackie that he believed her. Interestingly, this conversational exchange also displays how people construct normative behaviors are constructed in on-line dialogue. Spat's repeated use of apologetic language, such as, "Maybe you all will think I'm an asshole," "sorry again," and "again I apologize," indicates his awareness that others may criticize him for what he is saying. Spat is aware that for this group the normative behavior is to offer support, not criticism.

6. Statements of Agreement

A common finding in the thread was that people responded to jackie's story by agreeing with many aspects of it. Agreement here is very similar to 'statements of belief.' The difference is that posters explicitly stated that they are in agreement with some aspects of jackie's initial posting. By agreeing with these aspects, respondents created a sense of group structure and showed the referent power of the group, thereby creating a supportive milieu. Salem et al. stated that these types of statements, "express a

sense of identification with and feelings of attraction to other members of the group as a whole (i.e. that a given individual shares common experiences, attitudes, and or beliefs with the group of specific group members)" (Salem, et al., 1997, p. 207). Braithwaite et al. noted that posts which create a network of support, such as these, "appear to broaden the recipient's social network, by connecting him or her to others with similar interests or situations, including access, presence, and companions" (Braithwaite et al., 1999: 8). Therefore, by writing statements of agreement, posters showed acceptance and support for jackie, similar to those found in other on-line mutual help (support) groups.

5(1) from broken body; strong spirit

Friday, August 22, 2003, 12:17

It's very true what you mentioned about being told so many times that no such thing happened, or that it was our "distorted" perception; they certainly filled me up with that.

(1) from JudusChrist

Saturday, August 23, 2003-17:27

I agree with U Jackie!!!! Who knows people, she MAYU be Dramatising a fact yet is REMAINS a FACT!!

7. Statements Offering Compliments and Congratulations

Many messages to jackie included offers of compliments and congratulatory praise. These messages fit Braithwaite et al.'s, category of emotional support and esteem, and more importantly, these messages served to validate jackie's experience.

Braithwaite et al. stated that messages which boost esteem "validated the recipient's self-concept, importance, and rights as a person and included compliments, validation, and relief from blame" (Braithwaite et al., 1999, p. 9).

5(1) From broken body; strong spirit

Friday, August 22, 2003, 12:17

I think each and every person who has had to face any type of abuse at all is an extremely strong person. Just to decide to carry on inspite of your pain is amazing, and takes unspeakable courage.

7 (1) From I believe Jackie

Saturday, August 23, 2003, 16:04

To Jackie, you are courageous for posting your story.

(3) From Joe H

Sunday, August 31, 2003, 02:05

I commend your welcoming of doubts and questions, you're definitely a strong woman to be able to not only tell your story, but also to handle more prying and interrogation. Some people never recover from childhood abuse, but you seem to have done quite well.

Indirect

1. Indirect Support Through Pronoun Use

I identified supportive discourses when support did not appear to be the obvious goal of the statement. Although these statements felt somewhat supportive, they did not

contain the explicit references to support found in the prior category. Often these statements came in the form of telling one's own experience and sharing this experience with jackie and the group. Posters used certain rhetorical strategies that allowed them to express this common experience. For example, they used communal pronouns such as 'we' and 'our.' The use of these pronouns suggests that when posters replied back to jackie they are telling her that they have had similar experiences, and they can understand how she feels. This strategy can effectively show support for jackie.

The following exchange between Venusbutterfly and jackie shows how statements can implicitly convey support.

(1) from venusbutterfly

Friday, August 22, 2003 - 08:57

I mean, we've (or I) been told so many times that no such thing happenned, that even though i don't have the faintest idea why i'd just make up something as horrible as that, i can't say it happenned as a fact.

(2) From jackie

Friday, August 22, 2003, 09:23

hi how are you doing ? I know exactly what you mean when I started to write this article there were so many things that I wanted to say but this is all that came out. So many things are a blur in my mind and very had to pin-point because it wasnt just certain acts of abuse it was a constant mind abuse as well. However I am sure that I did not make it up! I still

have the scars on my body from the rape and see them every time I undress. I did not mention this in my article because I didnt want to get into it too much but I know I dont just imagine them there. The fact that we were always with so many other people and the constant moving around does not help too much in keeping ones memories clear. Take care cus!

This exchange between jackie and Venus displays an interchange of supportive discourse. Venus asked a question and within that question she began by saying "I mean, we've (or I)" then goes on to detail an experience that she had in the group. Jackie responded to her in an affirmative tone, and used the comprehensive pronoun "we". The tone and the pronoun use indicated that jackie felt that they shared a common experience. Their experiences in The Family are ones about which they can mutually support and give comfort to each other.

2. Indirect Support through Personal Example

Another indirect technique of showing support is through the use of offering a similar story as a response to jackie. 'Personal example' is a unique rhetorical strategy that offered the same support as the other indirect method, although the respondents do not use common pronouns to express the shared experience. The respondents used a personal example to effectively show jackie that she is not alone, that others have shared her experience. 'Personal examples' further reinforce jackie's story as being convincing and true, because they too have gone through a similar experience, and they shared her feelings about it.

(1) From broken body; strong spirit

Friday, August 22, 2003, 12:17

At one point in my time in TF, a lot older and still trying to understand all what happened, I talked to a "shepherd" about it, and they told me that I was just being self-righteous about the things that happened to me, and that I was too stuck up and prudish, that if I was truely honest with myself, I would admit that I actually enjoyed it, (can you believe it?) and that I just needed to accept that and move on. It was at the time of the court cases, and all of the "Statements" were coming out, and we would have all these "study sessions" about the issues in the Statements. They drilled into us (their version) that we "were not really abused," and that even though it was true that some things should not have happened, they weren't really all that bad, and that we should compare our experiences to REAL abuse that happens in "the System," and would mention a horrendous story or djtwo to convince us how "nice" we had it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, noting the large amount of supportive characteristics coded on the thread 'horror,' I was able to definitively answer my first research question by determining that, yes, <movingon.org>, and in particular, the thread 'horror,' functions as a supportive environment for many of second-generation former Family members. Additionally, I was able to identify some of the explicit and implicit rhetorical strategies

that many of these individuals used to provide support for one individual in need. Indeed, I was able to identify the same support-strategies that people use in face-to-face groups.

Potter and Wetherell note that there several analytic techniques researchers use to validate the results of a discourse analysis. The four main ones are (a) coherence, (b) participant's orientation, (c) new problems, and (d) fruitfulness (Potter and Wetherell, 1984, pp.170-172). I will discuss each of these and how they relate to this study below.

In this study, my findings of how poster's on the website <movingon.org> create a supportive milieu for each other using distinct rhetorical strategies (direct and indirect) provides evidence for how the posters' discourse fits together coherently. The unique discursive structure, either relaying support directly of indirectly, intuitively produces the effect of support and the creation of a supportive function.

The way people respond to each other is another way to determine the validity of a discourse analysis. Looking at how the talk is orientated and structured in the on-line forum confirms participants' orientations (for example, on a turn-by-turn basis). Therefore, when examining the talk on <movingon.org>, seeing members follow jackie's post with talk that appears supportive adds validation to my findings.

Potter and Wetherell state that one of the primary goals of discourse analysis is to "clarify the linguistic resources used to make certain things happen" (Potter and Wetherell, 1984, p. 171). Therefore, as we continue to look at on-line supportive discourse, questions will arise continually that eventually will further the understandings

of on-line support. In this emerging project of on-line discourse analysis, I feel my work is a preliminary study that can lead to a deeper understanding of supportive discourse. For example, researchers may want to investigate non-supportive discourse, normative behaviors, and the creation of doubt. The investigation of these new problems would produce a fuller, more robust understanding of support.

Potter and Wetherell's fourth criterion for validity is fruitfulness. This criterion refers to the "scope of an analytic scheme to make sense of new kinds of discourse and to generate novel explanations" (Potter and Wetherell, 1984, p. 171). I feel that this study has taken an initial step in determining new understandings of the creation of support in an on-line forum. Furthermore, the use of discourse analysis offers interesting theoretical perspective for exploring on-line group relations.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

The Family continues to flourish in many parts of the world. There are many former members who feel that the group, which was entrusted with their childhoods, has forgotten and betrayed them. Having left The Family, these young people face the difficult task of rebuilding stability and trust in their daily lives. One way of rebuilding close, trusting relationships is by surrounding one self with supportive people. Because of their unusual childhoods, many second-generation ex-Family members have difficulty finding others who share their unique experiences. Using a website like <movingon.org> allows these people to access others who understand and share their backgrounds.

In this work I have provided evidence from academic and Family literature about the risk of physical and sexual abuse of the children who grew up in The Children of God/The Family. Furthermore, I showed that the website <movingon.org> exists as a virtual support group for many second-generation ex-Family members. The discourse analysis of the postings in the 'creeps--horror' room of the website demonstrated the use of important rhetorical strategies.

By contextualizing my findings, with the academic writings about The Family, I presented in this thesis a concise history of David Berg and the group. In order to understand the lives of the second-generation young people (those using <movingon.org>), I read the sect's policies about child rearing and summarized them. Through this task, I gathered substantial insight into what their experiences were and why

a website such as <movingon.org> plays an important role in terms of support and comfort for the many people who use it as a resource.

The results of the thematic content analysis showed that <movingon.org> embodied the characteristics of a support group that Levy (1973) described as coming together because of a common life stress. In this case, the common life stress is the abuse that the members of <movingon.org> endured as children. Furthermore, the website may function as a way to enhance personal growth. This support group exists because these people face a common life stress and feel the need to come together to help themselves and others.

Through the thematic content analysis of one set of conversational exchanges on <movingon.org>, one can see the common characteristics of typical support groups — in particular, their emotional support, personal disclosures, and social support. These types of characteristics are essential for the effectiveness of the support that people give, and I found instances of them on <movingon.org>.

The nature of the on-line format goes further to assure that <movingon.org> is functioning in a supportive manner. As noted in this work, the asynchronous format is one that works well in virtual support groups. Furthermore, the anonymity as well as the degree of control that the posters have are advantages.

<Movingon.org> works as a weak tie network similar the ones studied by Wright and Bell (2003) and Wellman et al. (1996). Many of the individuals posting on <movinon.org> may or may not know each other, although they create a weak tie

community because they shared common childhood experiences. Wright and Bell suggest that these types of web communities serve various diverse functions such as access to information, facilitating disclosure of risky topics, or topics perceived to have a negative stigma (Wright and Bell, 2003). This type of relationship is advantageous because it reduces social isolation.

An important advantage to on-line support groups is that they span both time and space in order to create a community of people who share a common experience. The asynchronous forum of <movingon.org> allows its members to access each other no matter where they are in the world. This access helps to battle the isolation that many of these ex-members feel.

Following the thematic content analysis, a discourse analysis of one of the conversational threads in the room 'creeps' uncovered some distinct rhetorical strategies. Individuals demonstrated support for jackie most commonly by using the 'direct' approach. This approach involved distinct language usage that conveyed sympathetic comments, statements of care and concern, understanding, disclosure of similar experiences, statements of belief, statements of agreement, and compliments.

Some posters chose a more indirect method of showing support. The 'indirect' comments were unique from the 'direct' method. There were two types of 'indirect' strategies found. These strategies entailed the use of personal pronouns such as 'we' and 'our.' These pronouns enhanced a feeling of shared experience. The second type of 'indirect' strategy was the use of personal examples. Using this strategy posters

displayed support by offering a similar story to that of the primary poster. This technique allowed the poster to share a common experience there by providing validation to jackie's story.

This study looked primarily at the direct and indirect discursive strategies of supportive communication. It incorporated context in order to understand how the written discourse created a supportive environment. Further research may investigate other virtual rooms and threads on the website <movingon.org>.

Additionally, future research into the discourse of support should focus on the uniqueness of the rhetorical strategies of support found in this thesis. Perhaps a researcher could conduct comparative study of the discourse used on this website with another virtual support groups in which physical and sexual abuse are common factors. Another approach could build on the initial investigation into the idiosyncratic themes found through the content analysis.

A noteworthy limitation in the current research of on-line support groups is the ambiguous use of the term 'community.' Nicholas Abercrombie et al. state that the term "is one of the most elusive and vague in sociology and is now largely without meaning" (Abercrombie et al, 1984, p. 75). Furthermore, they state that the 'community' study tradition developed in participant observational research has now lost favour with sociological researchers (Abercrombie et al., 1984, p. 76). Indeed, researchers of on-line support groups use the terms 'community,' 'group,' and 'networks' interchangeably. As noted in this thesis, I chose to refer to the members of <movingon.org> as a supportive

'community' because of their shared concerns and common experiences (growing up in The Family). As research into on-line groups continues to develop, sociologists may want to revisit the term, 'community,' in order to deconstruct it in this new context.

Finally, this project adds to the growing body of research into on-line support groups. There are scores of on-line support groups and much of the current research looks predominately at comparing these groups to their traditional counter-parts. I feel that this project is pertinent, in that it takes the much need next step in the growing area of research into on-line support groups.

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Appendix One: Ethical Considerations

The users of the message boards did not require a special login or password to access the postings. The free accessibility to this website as well as the invitation to browse, read, or write shows that designers see it as a public forum. Therefore, by voluntarily posting to the site, posters gave implied consent for inquiry into their accounts and research into the site itself.

This study is similar to traditional third-party observational studies, where gaining informed consent from each participant is impossible. In this case, gaining consent from the parents of people younger than eighteen is problematic. For those participants who did not choose to post their ages, often clues existed within their posts that provided estimates for their ages. Often posters used 'handles' that included numbers that could relay their ages. For example, Angel77, suggests that the poster was born in 1977 and is 27 years of age. Through the analysis of each individual's posting, I am confident that there were no posters under the age of eighteen.

The posters on <movingon.org> ensured their own anonymity, by using 'handles' or nicknames. Users of the website had full control over how much anonymity they wished to have, and as a researcher I had no more access than the general public to their private information. In rare instances, indications exist of identities in some of the postings, which included people using their actual names as a login name. There is also an area on the web site where the posters, if they choose, can post more personal information about themselves, including information such as full name, email address,

age, and geographical location. The choice to provide information is completely voluntary, and many of the posters do not. This project did not utilize any demographic information provided by the posters on <movingon.org>.

Appendix Two: Definitions of Coding Categories from Deborah A. Salem et al.

Social Support

Emotional Support: Comments that nurture, encourage, support, or approve of other member's comments.

Advice and Information: Comments that provide (or promise to provide) concrete, direct, and specific suggestions, direction, or guidance about possible courses of action, or provided factual information intended to be useful to another members.

Cognitive Guidance: Comments that offer another member a new or different way to think about a problem or experience, including: interpretations, evaluations, redefinitions, and reconceptualizations.

Help-Seeking and Disclosure

Disclosure: Comments that give specific, personal information about the speaker or someone in the personal life of the speaker, including: discussion of feelings, desires, and behaviors that are generally non-public and not generally revealed to others.

Request for Feedback: Comments that directly request that the group or a group member provide an evaluation, guidance, or feedback.

Affective Responses

Agreement: Comments that show agreement, acceptance, support, or compliance with a prior posting.

Disagreement/Negative: Comments that disagree, are resistant or defensive, express doubt, or disapprove of a prior posting.

Humor: Comments that are intended to be funny or amuse other members of the group (sometimes accompanied by smiley faces).

Types of Knowledge

Experiential Knowledge: Comments that express knowledge gained from personal experience and participation in a particular phenomenon (e.g., knowledge about how to deal with depression gained by coping with one's own depression).

Professional Knowledge: Comments made by someone who identifies him/herself as an expert (based on education and training) that contain knowledge that one has access to because one is trained in a particular profession.

Second-Hand Professional Knowledge: Comments made by a non-professional that contain information gleaned from a professional source (e.g., a doctor, and a professional publication)

Group Structure/ Identification

Referent Power: Comments that express a sense of identification with and feelings of attraction to other members of the group or the group as a whole (i.e., that a given individual shares common experiences, attitudes, and/or beliefs with the group or specific group members).

Structure/Process: Comments that refer to group structure, format, and agreed upon ways of doing things, or to members' utilization of the group.

Appendix Three: Content Analysis Matrices

Content Analysis Matrix for Salem et al.'s codes

posting	disclose	feedback	agree	negative	humor	advice	guidance	emsuppor	refpow	stucture	totals
abuse	3	2	6	1	0	8	4	3	0	1	28
arc1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
arc2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
arc3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
brazil	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
canada	2	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4
catholic	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2
celebacy	4	3	1	5	1	3	1	1	0	0	19
children	7	1	0	0	0	3	2	3	0	1	17
cia	0	1	0	0	2	3	0	1	0	0	7
david	5	5	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	0	16
denounce	1	3	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	7
familiar	2	0	0	1	1	12	0	4	0	0	20
found	2	0	2	0	0	1	0	3	0	0	8
horror	**20**	**5**	**13**	**15**	**2**	**7**	**14**	**28**	**3**	**1**	**108**
jay	4	2	1	0	0	2	1	5	1	0	16
jesus	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
jumbo	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
myabuse	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
totals	51	23	24	22	6	42	23	56	4	3	254

Social Support Matrix

posting	advice	guidance	emsupport	totals
abuse	8	4	3	15
arc1	0	0	0	0
arc2	0	0	0	0
arc3	0	0	0	0
brazil	0	0	0	0
canada	0	1	0	1
catholic	2	0	0	2
celebacy	3	1	1	5
children	3	2	3	8
cia	3	0	1	4
david	0	0	6	6
denounce	1	0	2	3
familiar	12	0	4	16
found	1	0	3	4
horror	**7**	**14**	**28**	**49**
jay	2	1	5	8
jesus	0	0	0	0
jumbo	0	0	0	0
myabuse	0	0	0	0
totals	42	23	56	121

Help Seeking and Disclosure Matrix

posting	disclose	feedback	totals
abuse	3	2	5
arc1	0	0	0
arc2	0	0	0
arc3	0	0	0
brazil	1	1	2
canada	2	0	2
catholic	0	0	0
celebacy	4	3	7
children	7	1	8
cia	0	1	1
david	5	5	10
denounce	1	3	4
familiar	2	0	2
found	2	0	2
horror	**20**	**5**	**25**
jay	4	2	6
jesus	0	0	0
jumbo	0	0	0
myabuse	0	0	0
totals	51	23	74

Affective Responses Matrix

posting	agree	negative	humor	totals
abuse	6	1	0	7
arc1	0	0	0	0
arc2	0	0	0	0
arc3	0	0	0	0
brazil	0	0	0	0
canada	1	0	0	1
catholic	0	0	0	0
celebacy	1	5	1	7
children	0	0	0	0
cia	0	0	2	2
david	0	0	0	0
denounce	0	0	0	0
familiar	0	1	1	2
found	2	0	0	2
horror	**13**	**15**	**2**	**30**
jay	1	0	0	1
jesus	0	0	0	0
jumbo	0	0	0	0
myabuse	0	0	0	0
totals	24	22	6	52

Group Structure/Identification Matrix

posting	refpow	stucture	totals
abuse	0	1	1
arc1	0	0	0
arc2	0	0	0
arc3	0	0	0
brazil	0	0	0
canada	0	0	0
catholic	0	0	0
celebacy	0	0	0
children	0	1	1
cia	0	0	0
david	0	0	0
denounce	0	0	0
familiar	0	0	0
found	0	0	0
horror	**3**	**1**	**4**
jay	1	0	1
jesus	0	0	0
jumbo	0	0	0
myabuse	0	0	0
totals	4	3	7

Appendix Four: Family Specific Comments

Abuse in The Family: Comments made by posters that make reference to their own or someone else's experience of abuse by other Family members.

Anger: Expressions of anger made by posters.

Brainwashing: Comments made by posters that refer to brainwashing or mind control of themselves or others by Family members

Davidito Book: Any comments that mention the *Story of Davidito*

Denial of Sexual Abuse: Comments that had members denying sexual abuse at the hand of Family members.

Family Literature: Any mention of Family relevant literature other than the Story of Davidito, such as Mo Letters or True Komix.

Identity Transformation: Any comments that refer to a change in personal identity, (i.e. "I am a better person now").

Rectifying Misinformation: Any transaction where a poster clarifies information for another poster.

Victor Programs: Any comments that refer to the Victor Programs or Teen Training Centers.

Appendix Five: jackie's posting

JUST MY IMAGINATION

from jackie - Thursday, August 21, 2003

accessed 1068 times

I wanted to write this a long time ago but just never seemed to get the courage to do so, I hope that this time I will post it. This is what I went through in The Family. I insist on the fact that I have not in anyway exagerated or changed anything; this is how I remeber it. Most importantly this is how I lived it.

The first memories I have of abuse are from when I was about 5 years old. I remember men coming over to our "home" and having intimate contact with diferent women. We litlle girls dressed- up and danced for them , many times only in our panties. This happend so many times and I remember that it was very embarassing for me and the other little girls.

The first time I had any sexual contact with an "uncle" was at about the age of 6. This "uncle" would come and read us the "heavens girl" mags (you know the ones that were also just our imagination), while doing so he would stick his hand under the covers and touch me. I remember crying and telling him that it hurt really bad and he just stuck his finger in his mouth and then got back to it again asking me if it was better like that. I had terrible nightmares and when I wanted to tell my parents about this he told me that it was normal and that if I told them I would get a big spanking, so of course I didnt say anything. That was the first of many sexual abuses.

Then there were the spankings and emotional punishments as well. When I was 11 I was put on my first Victor program, it was horrible! We were always put on hard labour and treated like shit. I was on silence restriction for months on end and told that I was a "man-pleaser". If I rebelled and voiced any doubts or questions then I was rebellious and if in the end I tried to adjust to what they asked of me then I was being self-righteous.

One day I was cleaning the garbage area when one of the "shepherds" came and told me that I should go with him because I was going to get a spanking. I asked him why and what had I done wrong (again!) and he told me that I hadnt done anything wrong but that they felt that it would help me sober-up. So I was taken upstairs to a room with 5 people and told to pull down my clothes (I was already 12 and quite developed) they hit me with a big stick. It was horrible! I fell down after the first swat and was told that because I fell down (or should I say was knocked off my feet) ; I would get 3 more swats! About 2 months later I was taking a shower in one of those "shower rooms" with about 6 others girls when I noticed they were all staring at me , I asked them why and they told me that my back was full of black and blue lines! That is when I realised that I had bruises all over my back and bottom. One time they spanked another "Victor " infront of all of us other victors and I started to cry because it was just too much for me, I later got spanked for that as well.

When I was 13 I went with my parents to one of the RTCs and that is when I was raped by a man who was about 40 years old. Raped in the middle of the night by this

"uncle" who stank on wine and woke me up by touching me all over my body. I tried to scream but no sound would come out and he hit me. It was the first time I had someone inside me and I will never forget it - UNFORTUNLY! When I finally had the courage to tell someone about what had happend I was the one who got in big trouble. They put all kinds of restrictions on me and punished me for it. According to them it was me who provoked him and I was flirting with him. He was an ugly old man to me and in no time had such thoughts even crossed my mind , and even if they would have (DID NOT!!) he as an adult was the one to blame in any case!! There is no excuse!! Child abuse is child abuse!

There are a lot more things that I would be able to write about but I just dont have the time to keep on right now and dont want to bore you all. According to the Family this is all in the past and in my case I was told that it was just my imagination and blah blah. As I wrote in other articles I still wait for TF to acknoledge our existence and our pain! The Family has no right to talk about love because they know it not!! I hope that we will somehow find a way to get over all the hurt and be able to re-build our lives. To the Family and their perverted blood-sucking leaders I just wish them to BURN IN HELL! Here is the story of my imagination !Mine and so many others personal safari through hell!